

MARKETING THE CHURCH BACK TO ITSELF:  
A NEW PARADIGM FOR RENEWAL  
IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Professional Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Brent Christopher Leathers  
May 1990

© 1990

Brent Christopher Leathers

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*This professional project, completed by*

Brent Christopher Leathers,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

*Faculty Committee*

J. J. J. J. J.  
W. D. Rhodes

\_\_\_\_\_

April 27, 1990  
Date

Allen J. Moore  
Dean

## Abstract

### Marketing The Church Back to Itself:

A New Paradigm for Renewal In

The United Methodist Church

Brent Christopher Leathers

The United Methodist Church has suffered a major deterioration in its membership in the United States over the past twenty years. Such an attrition raises the critical question of whether the denomination has been able to secure a durable niche in relation to the competitive society in which it finds itself in the present age.

The social environment in the United States is generated primarily by the overarching ideology of capitalism which dominates the mindset and world-view of the very persons whom the church is destined to serve. One way of enabling the church to consciously enter the competitive realm for the hearts and minds of its potential congregations on both a successful and faithful basis is through the development of a theological and ethical foundation for what can be called the church's marketing paradigm. This marketing model, when applied to the church-renewal process, focuses on reclaiming what the institutional church offers to society in a language that

contemporary society can understand--a language which articulates the church's product, the value of that product, and the ways of presenting the various manifestations of the product in ministries and programs to the church's target customers.

The theological and ethical implications of understanding the institutional Christian church in the language of marketing are explored to determine if the church is acting in good faith and remains faithful in its mission as it generates greater success as an institutional expression of the church universal through the use of what can be considered capitalistic business practices.

## Table of Contents

### Chapter

1. Introduction . . . . .	1
Problem Addressed by the Project . . . . .	1
Importance of the Problem . . . . .	2
Thesis . . . . .	13
Major Terms . . . . .	13
Church . . . . .	13
Marketing . . . . .	13
Paradigm . . . . .	14
Marketing Paradigm . . . . .	14
Product . . . . .	14
Price . . . . .	14
Promotion . . . . .	15
Selling . . . . .	15
Evangelism . . . . .	15
Work Previously Done in the Field . . . . .	15
Scope and Limitation of Project . . . . .	17
Procedure for Integration . . . . .	18
Chapter Outline . . . . .	19
2. Process . . . . .	22
Identifying the Competition . . . . .	22
Engaging the Competition . . . . .	30

The Marketing Alternative . . . . .	37
The Faithfulness of Success . . . . .	45
3. Product . . . . .	49
The Product of Perception . . . . .	49
The Search for the Product . . . . .	56
The Product of Belief Itself . . . . .	60
The Need for the Product of Belief . . . . .	68
Shifting the Paradigm . . . . .	75
Obstacles to the Paradigm . . . . .	79
4. Price . . . . .	85
Essentials of Competitive Value . . . . .	85
The Presentation of Product Value . . . . .	94
The Positioning of Value . . . . .	100
Boundaries of Value . . . . .	111
5. Promotion . . . . .	122
Introduction . . . . .	122
The Perception Element . . . . .	124
Developing the Promotional Paradigm . . . . .	130
Worship . . . . .	132
Education . . . . .	136
Evangelism and Mission . . . . .	139
Nurturing Ministries . . . . .	139
Promotion Specifics . . . . .	141
Persuasion in Promotion . . . . .	149
How to Promote Effectively . . . . .	156
Understanding the Real Competition . . . . .	165

6. Ethics . . . . .	167
Introduction . . . . .	167
Theological Summary . . . . .	168
An Ethical Orientation . . . . .	170
An Ethical Process . . . . .	175
An Ethical Product . . . . .	182
An Ethical Price . . . . .	188
An Ethical Promotion . . . . .	194
Recovering the Success of Faithfulness . . . . .	199
An Ethical Conclusion . . . . .	210
7. Summary . . . . .	213
Review . . . . .	213
Suggestions for Further Development . . . . .	217
Conclusion . . . . .	219
Bibliography . . . . .	222



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Problem Addressed by Project

This project deals with current concerns regarding the loss of passion and enthusiasm in the United Methodist Church, which appear to be caused in part by the use of an outdated and ineffective marketing orientation which the church continues to follow despite a rapidly changing demographic and psychographic environment.

The leaders of the United Methodist Church over the past twenty years have done what could be perceived as an inadequate job of marketing the church's ministries, image, and value to its membership, which is resulting in the church losing the battle with secular forces that compete for its parishoners' time, talents, gifts and service. A concentrated study of marketing theory, interpreted and applied directly to the church's situation today, has not yet been developed with the necessary theological and ethical foundations for support.

While recent attempts have been made to apply marketing principles to the church, such efforts have focused too heavily on either the business-end of marketing or on the traditional means the church has used to communicate its

message. Either emphasis seems to be inadequate to help the church meet the modern challenges it faces. A new orientation that balances the secular with the sacred in its understanding of the church is needed. This new paradigm must be designed to enable the church to reinterpret its mission to contemporary society and to provide the church with a clearer understanding of church renewal. The development of such a paradigm is the focus of this project.

#### Importance of the Problem

The church of Jesus Christ is an outgrowth of the life and ministry of an historic person who lived two-thousand years ago. The fact that the church has endured throughout history by taking the shape of an institution (with denominational expressions) can be viewed from a marketing perspective as a major achievement. This is due to the fact that it was through the effective use of communication skill and persuasion (marketing/selling principles) that the early church communicated its message to the masses. While the Holy Spirit has traditionally been credited with enabling the expansion of Christianity to take place, one must not neglect the human element which provided the means through which the church survived the centuries as a vehicle for preserving Christ's vision and as a means of structuring for the future fulfillment of that vision.

Yet, in the present age, the competing demands of modern life seem to have passed by the traditional ways the

institutional church has sought to communicate Christ's vision to its own members as well as to the vast numbers of unchurched throughout the local community. The statistics are alarming as a recent edition of The United Methodist Newscope reveals.

U.S. membership in the UMC dropped below 9 million in 1988. Newscope estimates the denomination lost about 72,184 U.S. members last year, based on unofficial reports from annual conferences. This compares with a 69,608 loss in 1987.<sup>1</sup>

This downward trend is causing concerns at all levels of the church. According to United Methodist Bishop Richard B. Wilke, "In spite of hard work by many . . . each year, the denomination declines 65,000 to 80,000, each week about 1,470, or about six 'average' 250 member churches a week."<sup>2</sup>

The trend of declining membership is not a new concern, it has been an ongoing problem for the United Methodist Church for over a hundred-and-fifty years, yet it seems to have accelerated in the past quarter century. According to Bishop Wilke, "In 1968 The United Methodist Church comprised 6 percent of the country's population, in 1988, less than 4 percent."<sup>3</sup> In light of these statistics, the question the church seems to be asking itself is: How long can the

---

<sup>1</sup>United Methodist Newscope: The National Weekly Newsletter for United Methodist Leaders, 30 June 1989: 1.

<sup>2</sup>Richard B. Wilke, Signs and Wonders: The Mighty Work of God in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 16.

<sup>3</sup>Wilke, 17.

denomination last if it continues on its present course? If the message of the church is truly good news, then the church must critically reflect on why its members are fleeing for seemingly better news elsewhere. There must be a reason why so many of the church's own members do not seem to see the benefit of actively participating in the life of the institutional church. Somehow the church has allowed itself to become irrelevant to the large number of persons in American society whom it is called to witness. In the words of radio broadcaster William Quick, "the greatest divorce of the Twentieth Century has been the divorce between the sanctuary and the marketplace. The marketplace sued the sanctuary for its irrelevance in daily life."<sup>4</sup>

As early-American society adopted business philosophy--the capitalist system of thought--one result of that adoption was the demand by the marketplace to be allowed to operate in an autonomous sphere, as free as possible from the ethical and moral influence of the church. Business did not want to contend with religious principles when they stood in the way of prosperity and profit. One way the church responded to this dilemma was with the social gospel movement. The church consciously positioned itself as operating outside the business realm--as a conscience of business itself, a critical voice which condemned the lack

---

<sup>4</sup>William K. Quick, Signs of Our Times: A Vision for the Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 17.

of ethical behavior and moral turpitude it saw in business. The church operated in what H. Richard Niebuhr called a "Christ against culture" posture. One result of the church positioning itself in this manner was the loss of the church's potential impact on business ethics, a condition which contributed to the church's becoming irrelevant to the daily lives of many people involved in the business world. In addition, as the church further alienated itself from business philosophy, it closed itself to the positive wisdom which could be appropriated from the business community. Such a condition has contributed to the church's falling behind business in understanding ways of communicating effectively in a society dominated by capitalist thought. This is the situation the church continues to find itself in today.

The church has long underestimated the power of business and its dominant ideological orientation--capitalism. In order to regain its voice, in order to reclaim its relevance, the church must learn how to communicate effectively in a society which is dominated by the ideology of capitalism. While business has somehow been able to communicate effectively with persons of all ages the importance of what it has to offer them, the modern church has not been as successful in its endeavors. Many persons turn a deaf ear to what the church has to say, if, indeed, they have been exposed to the message at all. Nevertheless,

the church has the potential for reaching into persons' lives, as business itself does, if the church is willing to learn from business the way to connect with persons steeped in a capitalist ideology. If the church is willing to stand with business long enough to learn whatever wisdom the business world can offer the church, the church can be instrumental in transforming not only the lives of modern persons, but even business itself as well as the very ideology which allows for the communication process to take place. The church can use the principles that business is using and effectively apply those principles in order to compete with business for relevance to society. To accomplish this, the church needs to understand the capitalist business system and apply that understanding to the benefit of the church.

Whether the church approves or disapproves of capitalism, the church must understand that there is something good in the current system as it is now operating: people are making decisions, just like in the church arena. If the church believes in the inherent dignity of the individual and in the freedom of the individual to make decisions--and to make good decisions when given the necessary information--the church can learn to use the same principles business has learned and apply those principles to enabling people to choose the church. The church can learn and must learn how to appeal to persons in a

persuasive, relevant manner. The church has no choice in the matter. If the church fails to do this, it will continue to see its membership decline as its congregations flee to those other priorities that compete against the church's claim on its members' time and resources.

The disturbing trend of church-flight is reflected in declining membership and attendance in local churches, in declining stewardship (even as incomes continue to rise), in less participation by laity, and in an overall malaise among church members. The church has tried to understand the cause of this trend by questioning its theological orientations, its social witness positions, its polity, even its understanding of the Holy Spirit, but the answer(s) still remains hidden. So the church has turned outwards in an attempt to place the blame. It has cited numerous causes for its predicament: denominationalism, the resurgence of the more conservative churches, affluence which contributes to greater leisure time, simple laziness, etc. Nevertheless, the cause that has yet to be addressed assertively in current church renewal literature is the idea that the church may have been outmarketed, outsmarted and outprioritized by the very society it is committed to and is attempting to serve. The church seems to be losing the competitive battle for a share-of-mind of its own members. Marketing consultant George Barna provides some insight into this dilemma:

The local church competes with other organizations for the time, attention, money, loyalty--in short, the heart--of people. The real competition is not with other churches--it is with organizations, opportunities, and philosophies that provide people with an alternative to the Christian life. Our main competition is from organizations like ABC, CBS, Universal Studios, MGM, K-Mart, 7-11, JC Penney, and so forth. Those organizations continuously and aggressively seek to permanently place their products, services and philosophies at the core of the lives of the same people the church is trying to reach.<sup>3</sup>

The United Methodist Church is finding itself in an environment that is not new (the church in America has always been located in a competitive society), but one that must be interpreted in a new way. In the words of marketing consultants Al Ries and Jack Trout, "To be successful today, a company [church] must become competitor-oriented. It must look for weak points in the positions of its competitors and then launch marketing attacks against those weak points."<sup>4</sup> If the church can tolerate the militaristic language of this observation, there seems to be a message here that can enable the church to consider a new orientation for its mission to contemporary society.

The institutional church seems to have operated throughout history on the idea that it has what could be called a "God-given right" to the time and energies of its

---

<sup>3</sup>George Barna, Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 28.

<sup>4</sup>Al Ries and Jack Trout, Marketing Warfare (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 4-5.



members. This concept must be critically examined if the church is to understand the nature of its competitive problem. Such an arrogant attitude that assumes the purpose of church membership is institutional preservation oftentimes results in a sacrifice of the true mission of the church.

According to church consultant Lyle Schaller:

There is a natural tendency in every organization to place survival goals and institutional maintenance at the top of the agenda. . . . The worshipping congregation is not immune to this expression of cultural religion and institutional blight. A common result is a congregation begins to seek new members in order to perpetuate that institution, rather than to be responsive to the needs of the people that congregation is seeking to reach. The typical result is an effort to "sell our church" to that prospective new member, rather than to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of that individual.<sup>7</sup>

If the institutional church does have some divine right to the energies of its members without in some way earning that right, the United Methodist Church should not be facing the problem it is experiencing among its members. The issue the church currently faces is no less than an issue of competition. It is an issue of competing in a world that no longer blindly volunteers its allegiance to that which has not earned it or which has not been able to communicate its importance to that world in a convincing manner. A recent article in Time magazine clarifies the need for a new perspective:

---

<sup>7</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 19.

No doubt cultural and demographic changes have eroded mainline churches. Constant organizational reshuffles have taken a toll. In addition, far too many mainline churches are sorely lacking in the marketing and communications savvy that the Evangelicals employ to win new members. In fact, a contingent of prospering evangelical congregations exists within each of the mainline denominations. A preoccupation with political and social issues at the expense of good old-fashioned faith has alienated many members. Not only are the traditional denominations failing to get their message across; they are increasingly unsure just what that message is.<sup>8</sup>

Is the observation valid? The statistics speak loudly. The consuming public is no longer willing to settle for a confusing gospel message communicated by the church that expresses on the one hand "free grace for all" and yet which continues to grieve the loss of members who believe that message and who translate that belief into being intentionally absent from the institutional church because it is no longer necessary nor relevant for their lives. The church is faced with a problem it has not anticipated, one which is creating an identity crisis for the church. In the words of William H. Willimon, "In a society that places a premium on growth, any institution that has declined for two decades is bound to have a serious case of self-doubt."<sup>9</sup> The United Methodist Church is in trouble.

---

<sup>8</sup>Richard N. Ostling, "Those Mainline Blues," Time, 22 May 1989: 94.

<sup>9</sup>William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson, Rekindling the Flame (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 16.

What the church today must realize is that the battle for the modern-day church member is no longer being fought under the rules nor on the court of the church; it is being waged in the fields of the daily lives of the people outside the physical surroundings and structures of the institutional church. To meet this challenge, the church must learn to compete: it must aggressively communicate the gospel; it must take the initiative that it has something important to say, and it must actively develop that message so that it is given a fair hearing in today's media-dominated culture. The taking of a passive attitude and stance when it comes to entering the competitive arena will continue to result in increased loss of membership, reduction of ministries, and institutional turmoil.

In American society today, most major institutions are being held accountable to their constituents for their operation and must constantly earn the right of allegiance from their members. The church is no exception. If the church is to compete effectively and earn the right to elicit the ears and eyes of its people, it must learn how to penetrate the message of the gospel into the consciousness of persons who have been socialized as consumers. Many of the more conservative denominations have recognized this fact. As reported in Time:

Most mainline churches do not consider it their mission even to compete. Despite mainline emphasis on racial justice, conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention and Assemblies of God

are more adept at recruiting urban blacks and Hispanics, just as they are more successful at planting new churches in growing suburbs.<sup>10</sup>

Bishop Wilke confirms the findings:

In 1920, mainline bodies constituted 76 percent of the U.S. Protestant population, but by 1984, that figure had fallen to 53 percent (reported by Harvard University's William Hutchinson). Many younger, more vigorous, more zealous growth-oriented groups are converting significant numbers of disciples. The Assembly of God church has nearly doubled in the last fifteen years. The Southern Baptists, the Church of the Nazarene, the Salvation Army, and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints show consistently strong growth patterns.<sup>11</sup>

The church in the 1990s must learn how to be faithful to its call using all the gifts God has given it--including the gift of marketing--while maintaining its integrity and preserving its gospel message of good news in the process. The church has no choice, it must develop a theological support structure for the competitive stance in which it now finds itself, if it is to compete in the marketing arena for its own members as well as for the relevancy of the gospel. A new paradigm which merges the best understanding of marketing principles with theological insight is desperately needed. This new paradigm is presented in this project.

---

<sup>10</sup>Ostling, 95.

<sup>11</sup>Richard B. Wilke, And Are We Yet Alive?: The Future of the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 27.

### Thesis

This project is designed to show that through the critical understanding of marketing theory, integrated with theological and ethical principles and adapted to the unique mission and ministry of the local congregation, The United Methodist Church can regain priority in the lives of its members and rekindle their enthusiasm in support of the church's mission--in short--the church can be enabled to more effectively witness for the living Christ to the present age.

### Major Terms

For the purpose of this project, the following terms are defined in business language to capture the essence of their meaning. The reader is encouraged to interpret the definitions with a mindset as to how they could be applied to the church (a process that is undertaken in substantial depth in the following chapters).

#### Church

Unless otherwise stated, this term refers to the institutional expression of the church universal in general and to the Protestant mainline church (United Methodist included) in particular.

#### Marketing

The process of developing, pricing, promoting and distributing a product to a person in a specified target audience in a manner that elicits a response resulting in

the person taking ownership of the product, thereby satisfying the needs and desires of the consumer as well as the goals and objectives of the producer.<sup>12</sup>

#### Paradigm

A model of the process through which a business (or church) can effectively understand, identify, develop and promote its products to its own customers as well as to prospective new customers.

#### Marketing Paradigm

The application of marketing theory in a process designed to facilitate the persuasive flow of communication so that ideas are shared and information is conveyed to those who need, desire or want the benefits such communication can ultimately help provide.

#### Product

The whole package associated with a given item including its physical characteristics, shape, function, reliability, etc., as well as the perceived tangible and intangible benefits a person hopes to receive from taking ownership of that item.

#### Price

The value one places on a given product which is based in part on: the cost of production, packaging, promotion and distribution of the product; the availability of the

---

<sup>12</sup>Barna, 42.

product, and the perceived tangible and intangible benefits one hopes to receive from appropriating the product.

#### Promotion

The process of getting the story about the product out; communicating the product and price including the tangible and intangible benefits to the target purchaser and/or consumer.

#### Selling

The process through which people become involved with a product they need and/or desire. This process includes targeting prospects, contacting prospects, educating prospects, answering concerns and/or objections regarding the product, closing the prospect ("asking for the commitment" so that the prospect has the opportunity to take ownership of the product), and listening to feedback from the prospect for use in helping shape future products.

#### Evangelism

Sharing with contagious joy the message and ministry of the gospel in a persuasive manner with the presently unconvinced--both inside and outside the institutional church--in an attempt to enable the transformation of lives through the strengthening of belief in the activities of the living God.

#### Work Previously Done in the Field

In the area of church renewal and administration, the United Methodist Church has been the subject of reflections

by Richard B. Wilke, William H. Willimon, and Lyle Schaller. These persons have written extensively and are the most currently acknowledged experts in the field of church renewal in the United Methodist denomination. Their thoughts are referred to extensively throughout this project.

A non-Methodist resource that is also referred to extensively throughout this project is a book from Navpress called, Marketing the Church: What they Never Taught You About Church Growth by George Barna. This book deals with the basic premise of this paper on an introductory level; however, the book fails to probe the theological and ethical implications of applying marketing theory as a paradigm for addressing the need for the church to regain ownership of its product as it engages the competition in the arena of capitalism.

Additional reflections on church renewal include works by Kennon Callahan, T.A. Kantonen, and other well-known writers in the field.

Among those most acclaimed by their writings in the area of business marketing, advertising, sales and management are: Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, Tom Hopkins, Zig Ziglar, Al Ries and Jack Trout. Each author approaches the issue of marketing from a different angle which is integrated with other perspectives to provide the church



with the orientation necessary for optimum marketing success.

The theological and ethical foundations for this project are developed through reflection on the ministries of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, and on the thoughts of H. Richard Niebuhr, Martin Buber, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and T. A. Kantonen, as well as current church theologians: Gaylord Noyce, Richard Wilke and William Willimon.

The sociological aspects of this project are presented upon reflection on the thoughts of Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, Arnold Mitchell, Arthur Van Seters, Robert Heilbroner and other writers in the field of sociology.

#### Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project is responsible for analyzing three major concerns of marketing (product, price, promotion) as they affect the ways congregations of the United Methodist Church can perceive themselves and their mission in the United States, and will construct a framework for using those insights in an attempt to rekindle enthusiasm among church membership. This framework is presented with theological support for its inclusion as a viable paradigm for church renewal. The ethical implications of this proposal are also discussed. The question this project will finally attempt to answer is: Can the marketing paradigm--an outgrowth of

secular, capitalistic business-communication principles--be used in an ethical manner to sell the church back to itself?

This project does not discuss in depth all the intricacies of the complex field of marketing (a field that is well beyond the scope of this study), all the potential product derivations the church could develop and offer (limited only to its imagination), all the specific ways the church can establish the value of its product, the pros and cons of all advertising vehicles at the church's disposal, nor the intricacies of external evangelism. In addition, this project does not develop the application of the marketing paradigm for churches located outside the United States whose dominant economic ideology is other than capitalism.

#### Procedure for Integration

Whether one likes it or not, the church already uses marketing principles in its daily life, even if only on an unconscious level. This project seeks to bring into consciousness the ways the church can maximize the effective use of marketing theory for membership regeneration and retention, and ultimately evangelism. There are three main areas which must be addressed for an integrated approach to this topic:

1. The ethical question which must be raised: Is it right to use capitalistic business principles in serving the church of God?

2. The theological question must be raised: Is the church being faithful to the cause of Christ by using secular means?

3. The functional question must be raised: Is the marketing paradigm--a practical, secular outgrowth of capitalistic thought which is perceivably manipulative and open to abuse--able to be used to carry out the will of the living God as understood by the church?

The method followed in this study primarily involves library research including articles, books, research findings, etc., found in the public domain. Additionally, personal reflections in the area of selling and marketing are included by the writer who has implemented many of the ideas set forth in this project while serving on the staff of Claremont United Methodist Church.

#### Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 deals with the concept of Process--How does one begin conceptualizing the marketing paradigm as applicable to the local church? This chapter addresses the ideological world of capitalism in which the church finds itself, and explores the reasons why marketing principles provide a means of enabling the church to understand itself more clearly as it ministers in a capitalistic society.

Chapter 3 focuses on the concept of Product--What is the product the church has to offer? This chapter identifies and discusses the dominant Product the church has

been entrusted with and which it offers to society through various derivations.

Chapter 4 deals with the concept of Price--How much is the Product worth? This chapter focuses on the need and obligation to place a value on the Product offered by the church and offers ways of establishing and maintaining such value.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the concept of Promotion--How to keep the church visible. This chapter focuses on how to keep congregations informed of the specific derivations of the Product the church has to offer, how to package those derivations effectively, how to position them for optimum desirability, and how to maintain integrity throughout the promotion process.

Chapter 6 struggles with the theological and ethical implications of applying marketing principles to church renewal. This chapter seeks to answer the question: Is the marketing endeavor as applied to the United Methodist Church a legitimate possibility for what has previously been considered a capitalistic business creation--a concept which has long been thought of as antithetical to liberal theological thinking?

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the project and offers concluding remarks as well as suggestions for further study which are designed to help the church address its concerns more clearly as it struggles to be effective in the

competitive environment it will continue to find itself in  
throughout the close of the century.

## CHAPTER 2

### Process

#### Identifying the Competition

In order for a local congregation to seriously consider applying effective marketing principles to their advantage, an understanding of the context in which the church finds itself today is necessary. The United Methodist Church is faced with a challenge that affronts its very right to exist--a challenge that comes not from some other religious denomination or philosophy, but from the dominating ideology of American culture itself. This ideology is proving itself to be as powerful (if not more powerful, in some cases) than the church seems willing to accept. Nevertheless, the mainline church is no longer able to hide behind its excuse for blaming loss of church membership on secularism or on a lessening of religious fervor in American society. It is time to put the blame where it is due--on the ideology that is calling the church's relevancy into question--the ideology of capitalism.

Capitalism has been defined by Webster's as

an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods

that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.<sup>1</sup>

Capitalism is the ideology by which American society operates; it is an ideology which carries its own language--the language of product, price, promotion and distribution--a language which modern society understands, accepts, and lives by--a language the church too must learn to speak if it is to reclaim a primary position for itself in the modern age.

The church today is located in a society that operates not from a religious/theological orientation, but from the position of a powerful ideology. It is this acceptance by society of the economic force of capitalism which sets the boundaries that define and control the physical quality of life for most of society, including the church's own members. Those who prosper under the system seem to accept the system and what it provides. This acceptance supports the ongoing continuance of the system and its ideological control over persons' lives. Those who do not prosper under the system criticize the system, but are nevertheless still subject to the power of the system. Capitalism appears to be able to absorb criticisms directed at it and to exclude most of that which is unable to compete with its ideology. Such an observation can be useful to the church as it

---

<sup>1</sup>"Capitalism," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary [1st ed.].

struggles with ways to make itself more visible and to minister more effectively in the midst of such an ideologically dominated society.

Anthropologists have long confirmed that human existence at its very essence is subject to the demands of survival which, in modern society, have been defined in monetary terms: the more money one acquires, the better one's chances are to survive. At its very basic level, capitalism communicates to society that in order to survive, one must have the means to purchase life's necessities (food, clothing, shelter). The means of this transaction is in the form of a medium of exchange (cash, barter, etc). The more one possesses the mediums of exchange, the more one can purchase and, ultimately, the greater ones chances for survival under this system. Yet, with limited available resources, the process of acquiring the needed mediums of exchange is thrust into the realm of competition. If one is to amass more capital for oneself or ones family, it has to come from somewhere. Robert Heilbroner explains:

Capital is powerful only insofar as it continuously runs the gauntlet of circulation, each capitalist of necessity distributing his money into the hands of the public (his workers, his suppliers) in order to procure the labor services and materials from which his capital will be reconstituted as a commodity. Each capitalist must win back from the public at large the money capital he has disbursed to various sectors of it, and each capitalist is simultaneously trying to win for himself as much as possible of the money capital of other capitalists that has been relinquished in similar fashion.



This continuous dissolution and recapture is the essence of the process of competition.<sup>2</sup>

The capitalist ideology tells society that an individual must work to survive; that money is needed to secure food, clothing and shelter; that one must compete for that money; that the more capital one acquires and reinvests, the more security one will ultimately have--for it is in the amassing of capital that one experiences his or her ultimate security. The essence of survival is defined in capitalist terms by how much capital one has working for oneself (invested in stocks, bonds, real estate, tangible goods, factories, etc.) that can be appropriated when needed to purchase the necessities of life. This understanding has a definite impact on how people interpret and act upon what they perceive to be their source of security. According to Heilbroner,

Capital reduces all forms of wealth, whether sought for prestige or power, to money terms, and this common basis of measurement now brings far-reaching changes in the behavioral dispositions of individuals who seek wealth.<sup>3</sup>

The amassing of wealth has become the legitimated end--all of the capitalistic orientation--an orientation that dominates American society. However, persons under the spell of capitalism are not content with just the

---

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Heilbroner, The Nature and Logic of Capitalism (1985; reprint, New York: Norton; Ontario: Penguin, 1986), 56-7.

<sup>3</sup>Heilbroner, 55.

acquisition of the means to the necessities of life. The essence of the capitalist ideology itself is such that a person is never capable of being secure (nor happy) without more and more capital.

It is this belief in the ongoing search for security--to be found in the amassing of enough capital (a process that is never completed)--that makes the ideology of capitalism so perverse. It is a belief that places capitalistic thought on the same level as a belief in God in the lives of many Americans. The implications of this ideology are easily understood: one either works or one does not eat; one either works or else one suffers the consequences; one either amasses capital or one ultimately will not be able to buy the things one needs and, therefore, one will either not survive or else will not be able to enjoy the standard of living one so desires.

The capitalist ideology is so powerful that it permeates all aspects of society, not just the economic realm. Even the church itself is not immune to its effects. According to Heilbroner, "Capitalism, as the dominating principle of society identified by its presence, must color and infiltrate the institutions and beliefs that lie beyond its immediate ambit of operation."<sup>4</sup> The church seems to have either overlooked the seriousness of the challenge

---

<sup>4</sup>Heilbroner, 84.

capitalism has leveled on religious thought or else has been powerless to negate the immense force of capitalism and the control it exerts over people's lives.

The Christian church has been around for almost two-thousand years, yet in the little more than two-hundred years that capitalism has been dominant in American society, capitalism has taken on and is in the process of defeating the Christian church where it affects the church the most--in the competition for the time and energy of its members. In the midst of this battle, the church is at a major disadvantage. While the church must be willing to honor the need for persons to work for a living within the economic system they are under, the capitalist ideology does not reciprocate in kind. To the capitalist ideology, the church is an expendable institution, lower among the priorities of survival (as defined by the ideology) and lower among those things that constitute security and stability in life (as also defined by the capitalist ideology).

It is interesting to note that the church is not even aware of what is happening to it because it has not yet adopted the vocabulary necessary for it to clearly articulate the problem it currently faces. The church needs to view its problem in a language that is able to adequately define the situation. Without such a language the church will continue to lose the battle for relevancy in the lives of the people it seeks to attract and influence.

In order for the church to be relevant to modern individuals, the church must come to realize that capitalism is a power which demands an ideology of equal or greater force than itself in order to be challenged--an ideology the church has not yet been able to communicate effectively in the present age. If the church is to challenge this basic ideological understanding of reality held by American society, it must do so by using the powers inherent in the system itself against the system. The church must discover the reason why capitalism is as powerful as any religious understanding. In Heilbroner's words,

The installation of the ideology of capitalism . . . resembles the popular revolution, not only calling on new forms of social explanation but seeking a new source--in actuality, new sources--of legitimacy powerful enough to challenge the authority of the universal church.<sup>5</sup>

Although the mainline church does not seem willing to accept it, the church continues to be bested by an ideology which is understood by the church to be something that is less powerful than the church itself. The church's message that it somehow has a special relationship with God and that God is the answer to life's questions does not seem to carry too much weight with modern individuals when trust in God does not appear to affect one's need to work for one's daily bread. Even the church's message that it is really God who provides the bread (and not the supermarket) is perceived as

---

<sup>5</sup>Heilbroner, 108.

irrelevant and untrue at the very basic level of human existence which has been defined by the language of the capitalistic ideology.

The church's retreat behind the statement, "but we have God on our side," is a losing battle in modern culture. The statistics do not lie. A powerful ideology literally controls the daily lives of most of the church's congregations by supporting the ideas that one must work for a living, that money does buy happiness, that financial security is found in the accumulation of wealth. These are the core messages of capitalism which the church must find a way to combat. These are messages that directly compete with the church's message that it is God and not capital that is the ultimate source of life--a message that oftentimes falls on deaf ears as the bill collectors and desires for material products block out the seemingly irrelevant message of the church. The question that the church must answer in the midst of this situation is: How can the church compete with capitalism on the ideological ballfield? The answer may be more clearly located if the church begins to understand itself as a business that has a product to offer and begins to view those very persons who make up the church itself as potential consumers (purchasers, owners) of that product.

### Engaging the Competition

Capitalism does not operate an environment which has no boundaries. Inherent in the thought itself is the fact that capitalism is entrapped by its own ideological parameters. In other words, the capitalist system is designed to feed on itself; it is designed to alienate that which is not inherently a part of the system itself. Capitalism is a self-perpetuating, closed ideology that cannot be challenged effectively from outside its own system (short of revolution). Yet, this ideology does have a weakness in its strength. By understanding capitalism as subject to the limitation of self-perpetuation (excessive desire, greed, avarice), the church can use this fact to its own advantage as it attempts to competitively engage, and even use for its own purposes, the power it finds itself confronting in the capitalist ideology.

In human terms, capitalism manipulates the individual who lives under its system by communicating the subtle yet persuasive message that as one gathers more material (capital) for oneself (material that is not to be spent but re-invested to produce more capital), one's orientation towards life becomes increasingly less secure as one's expectations increase and one's feelings of security decrease. This condition results in the individual's participation in a self-perpetuating fear that one will never possess enough capital for one's ultimate security.

This perception contributes to the anxiety, stress and uneasiness confronting persons in American society today. For the purposes of this project, this is the inherent drawback of the capitalist system--the achilles tendon which the church can use for its own benefit as it attempts to engage the competition.

For the majority of persons in America, life has become increasingly chaotic. People are searching for order and stability; something grounding, something reliable, something ultimate, something eternal is being sought. Sociologist Peter Berger explains that this condition provides religion with the opportunity to be relevant:

One fundamental human trait, which is of crucial importance in understanding man's religious enterprise, is his propensity for order . . . within this order the life of the group as well as the life of the individual makes sense. Deprived of this order, both group and individual are threatened with the most fundamental terror, the terror of chaos. . . .<sup>4</sup>

American society can be considered in some ways as producing a population floundering in ordered chaos. There are many fearful, needy individuals who view reality as unreliable and unstable (the outcome of the capitalist mindset that ultimate security can never to be found); yet, who nevertheless, accept such a reality since capitalism does provide the means through which life can continue on a

---

<sup>4</sup>Peter L. Berger, A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 66.

somewhat consistent, dependable schedule for most people. Experience seems to show that if one works, one will eat under the capitalist system. Yet, for most people in American society, the mere fact of existence itself is not enough. There must be something more to life. So the individual begins to struggle and to search for meaning and purpose to justify existence itself. This process can be best understood in the language of the business world through the use of terms associated with consumer behavior:

The consumer decision process begins with the recognition that a problem exists. A consumer problem is simply a difference between an existing state and a desired state. Once the consumer recognizes that a problem exists, the problem must be defined. This is a frequent source of frustration for consumers, as they know something is wrong but cannot put their finger on what bothers them.<sup>7</sup>

The church's message to this struggle is one that has historically challenged the individual's perception of the problem by labeling what one experiences in this world as non-ultimate, as subordinate to God. Yet, as Berger explains, "when the socially defined reality has come to be identified with the ultimate reality of the universe, then

---

<sup>7</sup>Del I. Hawkins, et al, Consumer Behavior: Implications for Marketing Strategy (Dallas: Business Publications, 1980), 32.



its denial takes on the quality of evil as well as madness."<sup>8</sup>

The church has been viewed as criticizing the reality (the capitalistic construct) in which individuals in American society find themselves. The church is perceived as living in an artificial world that has little relevance to the daily problems of persons living under a capitalist ideology; as a result, persons protest the seemingly untrue and incredible message conveyed by the church by retreating from the church. The message of the church is irrational to them; it does not connect with their reality; it does not provide the pertinent answers.

The institutional church seems to be living in a different reality than the one which affects the daily lives of its congregations--a perception it can no longer afford to allow to continue. As Berger points out, "The religious factor must not be considered as operating in isolation from other factors, but rather as standing in an ongoing dialectical relationship with the 'practical' infrastructure of the social life."<sup>9</sup> One basic aspect of this social life is the fact that a dialectical relationship is defined by the giving and receiving of ideas, concepts and beliefs. It

---

<sup>8</sup>Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (1967; reprint, Garden City: Doubleday/Anchor, 1969), 39.

<sup>9</sup>Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 110.

is this dialogue which enables the church to be relevant and which enables the experienced social reality of persons to influence the understanding of the church with regards to its ministries, social witness, etc. Such a sharing of insights takes place through the process of persuasively communicating ideas--through making sure both parties have heard and understood the communication exchange. This process has been called responsive-listening and forms the foundation of the concept of marketing. As business motivational speaker Zig Ziglar claims,

If we want to motivate other people, we have got to find out what their reason, purpose, or cause is. People are not going to be motivated for your reasons. They are going to be motivated for their own reasons.<sup>10</sup>

In order for marketing to be understood by the church, the church must understand the foundation on which marketing itself is based. As a creation of capitalistic thought and an outgrowth of its social manifestation, marketing was born by capitalism as an instrument to support the communications infrastructure necessary for capitalism to function effectively. In this manner, marketing is conducive to the continuation of capitalism, and yet it also holds the power through which capitalism itself can be effectively challenged, if used properly. The essence of marketing is found in the basic premise for its application--to provide

---

<sup>10</sup>Zig Ziglar, Top Performance (Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1986), 222.

the means through which ideas are communicated effectively so that response is somewhat predictable and action is taken in the direction of the desired outcome by the parties involved in the process. By definition,

Marketing is the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from the producer to the consumer, to satisfy the needs and desires of the consumer and the goals and objectives of the producer.<sup>11</sup>

This understanding of marketing has long been appropriated by the business community (the community that most obviously adheres to capitalistic thought) and may be adapted as follows for use by the church:

Church marketing is the performance of both business and ministry activities that impact the church's target audience with the intention of ministering to and fulfilling their spiritual, social, emotional, or physical needs and thereby satisfy the ministry goals of the church.<sup>12</sup>

If the church is serious about combatting the capitalist ideology on its own terms, the church needs to understand the realm in which marketing most effectively operates--the competitive realm of goods and services--the realm of competitive business.

Whether it acknowledges it or not, the church competes in society and with society for a person's time, talents, gifts and service. This competition is not so much with other denominations or religions as it is with the

---

<sup>11</sup> Barna, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Barna, 48.

overarching capitalist ideology that all religions and denominations are finding themselves competing against. Society seems no longer willing to accept a definition of reality that does not fall within the capitalistic concept of competition. If an idea cannot compete, then it must not be very important. Society is no longer willing to accept an idea forced on it, unless the idea is competitive in the arena of opposing viewpoints which constitute a pluralistic society. No institution is immune from this condition.

Peter Berger explains,

As a result of secularization religious groups are also compelled to compete with various non-religious rivals in the business age defining the world, some of them highly organized (such as various ideological movements of revolution or nationalism), others much more diffused institutionally (such as the modern value systems of 'individualism' or sexual emancipation).<sup>13</sup>

In this competitive environment, the church must struggle for a voice; it must struggle for its position of validity and relevance. The church must compete. According to Berger:

The key characteristic of all pluralistic situations . . . is that the religious ex-monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations. Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result, the religious tradition which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed. It must be 'sold' to a clientele that is no longer constrained to 'buy'. The pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions become marketing

---

<sup>13</sup>Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 137.

agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities. And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics.<sup>14</sup>

The church must be a marketer if it is to survive or at least have a voice which is heard in today's society. Several questions are immediately raised by this statement. How does the church become a successful marketer? How does the church utilize the acumen of business enterprise to further its cause? How does the church balance the ethical implications of using such secular means with the negatives inherent in the system to begin with? These questions are dealt with in succeeding chapters. For the present, a closer look at how the church is engaged in the process of opening itself up to a marketing orientation will provide an overview for the specifics of the process itself.

#### The Marketing Alternative

Applying marketing theory and principles to religion is nothing new. Even at the beginnings of the Christian church marketing concepts were used. Jesus himself could be considered an effective marketer in his own time. According to Barna,

Jesus Christ was a communications specialist . . . . Notice the Lord's approach: He identified His target audience, determined their need, and delivered his message directly to them. By addressing the crowds on the mountainsides, as the Jesus in the Temple, He promoted His product in

---

<sup>14</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 138.

the most efficient way possible: by communicating with the "hot prospect."<sup>15</sup>

Such business language may seem foreign to theological reflection, but the fact is nevertheless apparent--Jesus Christ used the communication means at his disposal to preach and teach his message. The same means are at the disposal of today's church through a conscious marketing-orientation. This attitude is beginning to catch on in the current literature on church renewal and growth as a recent study of the contemporary church reveals:

At the risk of seeming crass, we are wondering if a market analogy might be fruitful for congregations. Most businesses, small and large, do market analyses, by which they hope to discover the needs within their markets, the products that offer some promise of fulfilling those needs, and the best way to package and market those products . . . congregations might do their special business better if they were to gather from the members some information about what they think the church should do for them, as do secular business, even if this way of putting the question misunderstands the church. Only when misunderstandings are reckoned with can they be corrected.<sup>16</sup>

An article in the Los Angeles Times reports that a church in a Chicago suburb credits its success to just such an effort:

Willow Creek is one of a very few churches in the nation shaped by a targeted "customer" survey. It is also a huge success. From a modest gathering of 125 people who first met in a rented

---

<sup>15</sup>Barna, 32.

<sup>16</sup>Gordon E. Jackson with Phyllisee Foust Jackson, Pathways to Faith: The Stories of 210 Faithful People (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 181.

movie theater 14 years ago, it has grown to its current position as the nation's No. 2 Protestant congregation in terms of weekend attendance.

Some church analysts look upon Willow Creek as the prototype for successful churches of the 1990s, exemplifying approaches they think will reach an increasingly secular and pluralistic society.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, despite the stories of churches like Willow Creek who are successfully implementing a marketing-orientation toward their ministries, criticisms are leveled at the application of marketing concepts to aiding the church in its mission. Many of these criticisms seem to come from a misunderstanding and misperception about what constitutes the essence of marketing. According to Barna,

Many people associate sales and marketing with high-pressure tactics, unscrupulous individuals, and illicit wheeling and dealing . . . that is not what marketing is all about. . . . Marketing actually involves a broad range of activities such as research, product positioning, awareness development, strategic planning, pricing, advertising, public relations, and audience segmentation.<sup>18</sup>

Another criticism which has been leveled at the use of marketing theory by the church has little to do with marketing itself, but arises from a skepticism regarding the benefits of change. Lyle Schaller summarizes this line of thinking quite forcefully:

The natural and predictable responses to any new idea the first time it is presented tend to fall into seven overlapping categories. The first is

---

<sup>17</sup>Russell Chandler, "Customer Poll Shapes a Church," Los Angeles Times, 11 Dec. 1989: A1, A28-30.

<sup>18</sup>Barna, 41.

to explain why *that* would not work. The second is to explain why *that* would not work *here* in our situation. The third is to explain why *that* would not work *here now*. The fourth is to affirm the status quo. The fifth is to identify insurmountable obstacles. The sixth is to begin to build a list of those who will oppose it and the seventh is to attack the competence or integrity of those who propose the change.<sup>19</sup>

Skeptical criticisms defeat the consideration of a new orientation toward church growth--an orientation that must come about if the church is to be successful as it attempts to remain faithful to its mission. Such criticisms are especially demotivating when they come not from outside the United Methodist denomination, but come instead from the mouth of two of the church's leading proponents of church renewal. In the words of William Willimon and Robert Wilson, "Of course the church is not a business. Jesus Christ is not a product, and those who are unchurched are not merely potential customers."<sup>20</sup> While their observations are semantically correct, both Willimon and Wilson fail to consider the possibility that the church actually operates under the same constraints that face a business in society. The church is an entity that is located in the midst of a secular, capitalistic society in which the sacred competes with the secular for a share-of-mind of the potential recipients of the various messages that bombard the

---

<sup>19</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, 44 Ways To Increase Church Attendance (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 48.

<sup>20</sup>Willimon and Wilson, 25.



potential consumer (both as product purchaser and as church goer) on a daily basis.

In an attempt to preserve what appears to be the sacred integrity of the church, Willimon and Wilson fail to take into account that the gospel message is already in a competitive environment and does compete with other ideas and priorities. Willimon and Wilson seem unwilling to acknowledge that the gospel must compete and that the gospel will either compete or else it will fail in its task to transform lives through the instrument of the church. Willimon and Wilson's main concern does not seem to address the larger critical issue confronting the church--the fact that the church is losing the competitive battle with secular forces. Yet, despite this observation, what Willimon and Wilson define as the major issue for the church is stated in political rather than in marketing terms:

Our church's mission has been reduced to politics, our Social Principles mirror, to a great extent, the political opinions from one part (generally the left) of the secular political spectrum. When our church speaks it speaks mostly in political terms rather in religious ones. . . . The United Methodist Church has fused and thereby confused its peculiarly Christian values with the dominant values of American culture.<sup>21</sup>

Willimon and Wilson's opinion can be considered a logical conclusion given the situation the church finds itself in, but it only addresses the surface of the deeper

---

<sup>21</sup> Willimon and Wilson, 29.

problem. The real issue the church faces is not whether it is involved in politics, but whether there is too much secular control over the means which are now necessary to communicate messages that are designed to shape world views and which ultimately affect how humans respond to the stimuli that compete for their attention in a complex, sensory-overloaded world. What must be understood is that the message the church communicates (political or otherwise) is not the primary reason for the current problems facing the church. What the church primarily faces is the way in which its message is either communicated or non-communicated to those it seeks to influence. According to Berger:

Previously, the religious groups were organized as befits an institution exercising exclusive control over a population of retainers. Now, the religious groups must organize themselves in such a way as to woo a population of consumers, in competition with other groups having the same purpose. All at once, the question of 'results' becomes important.<sup>22</sup>

The church is thrown into the world of marketing whether it likes it or not. It appears that Bishop Richard Wilke grasped this concept most clearly in his first book on church renewal as he writes, "Of course, in the mass media, the Word of Christ goes smack dab into the secular world, but that's the world we are trying to penetrate."<sup>23</sup> In a more recent recent book Wilke further develops this line of

---

<sup>22</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 138-39.

<sup>23</sup> Wilke, And Are We Yet Alive, 116.

thinking, but seems to support Willimon and Wilson's view that the church is not a business:

Some businesses claim to be "consumer driven." They listen carefully to each nuance of the public's wishes, trying to respond helpfully and profitably. It makes for a fast-moving, flexible, constantly renewed organization. Another term used in the secular world is *demand or market driven*.

But the church is not a business. Its ministry is more complex than that of a corporation . . . the mission is not determined by perceived need alone. Market driven, even spiritual, does not explain our compulsive thrust. The world, even in its brokenness, does not set the agenda for the church. Rather, our mission is motivated by the Lord of the church. Jesus Christ gives the commands.<sup>24</sup>

Although Wilke seems to have grasped the main thrust of the competitive situation that confronts the church, Wilke does not appear to take seriously enough the possibility that the agenda for the church is set to a large degree by the brokenness of the world. According to Wilke, the agenda for the church is defined by Christ who gives the commands. If this is the case, the question naturally follows: How are those commands communicated? Are they dictated by some divine radio announcement? Are they to be extracted from what come to be considered the "acceptable sayings of Jesus?" Wilke seems to avoid considering the possibility that the communication process through which needs are identified and the agenda for the church is recognized is essentially a marketing process. A persuasive communication

---

<sup>24</sup>Wilke, Signs and Wonders, 50.

of need by the world to the church is the way the church primarily identifies its mission and establishes its agenda.

Wilke, Willimon and Wilson seem to avoid facing the critical issue confronting the church. The church does not want itself to be defined by society, yet it is being driven by that same society into a downward spiral of irrelevancy and is losing (if it has not already lost) its voice to the masses. The fact remains, the institutional church is a business. This concept of church as business is best expressed in the words of English professor Turner N. Clinard:

All of us are members of the greatest company in the world. God started this business and he remains head of the firm.

1. He decides what product we shall produce: mature persons in Christ.

2. He makes clear the company's goals: "the rule of God in human lives" or, as H. Richard Niebuhr put it, "the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor."

3. He sends out the corporation's representatives: "Go into all the world."

4. He commits to our trust the word of his grace, the Christian gospel, "entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). So our business is God's business.<sup>25</sup>

As the church begins to recognize itself as operating in an environment in which the church functions in many ways as a business, it will be able to appropriate and more effectively implement marketing concepts--a process which is

---

<sup>25</sup>Turner N. Clinard, Responding to God: The Life of Stewardship (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 37.

both warranted and demanded if the church is to remain faithful in its mission to the present age.

### The Faithfulness of Success

One of the most common cliches that seems to float around clergy circles is the saying that "we are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ." This is a concept that must be both denied and repudiated by the church if the church is to effectively implement the steps necessary to rise above its present state of malaise. Such an attitude that faithfulness has nothing to do with success is de-motivating, it settles for mediocrity instead of excellence. In their monumental book A Passion for Excellence, Tom Peters and Nancy Austin share the business secret for success which the church should be made aware of:

In the private or public sector, in big business or small, we observe that there are only two ways to create and sustain superior performance over the long haul. First, take exceptional care of your customers . . . via superior service and superior quality. Second, constantly innovate. That's it.<sup>26</sup>

George Barna elaborates on this concept as applied to the church:

While some church leaders would reject a forceful, success-oriented attitude, I believe that men of vision inevitably exhibit an unquenchable need to do their work well as it can be done and to push the limits of what is possible. Far too often,

---

<sup>26</sup> Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference (New York: Random House, 1985), 4.

church leaders are complacent and accepting of whatever happens or whatever can get done without must sweat. But look at societal visionaries and biblical figures who exemplified vision; they were zealous in their efforts to achieve their goals.<sup>27</sup>

Church consultant Lyle Schaller offers a similar conclusion,

Excellence, equality, and choice have replaced survival as the key words in the evaluation of the institutions in our society. The affluent society has made the depression ethic obsolete, and the old choices of "take it or leave it" no longer are adequate. Today the reward system places a premium on excellence, performance, personality, and a range of choices.<sup>28</sup>

The church is affected by the success-ethic--it must program for success in order to compete. But the objection is often raised that the church does not have to compete in the terms of other secular businesses, for the church is a non-profit organization and is not subject to the secular demands of the business world. Such a statement does not recognize the fact that the institutional church is, in a very real sense, a business.

The term business is defined by Webster's as an "activity concerned with the supplying and distribution of commodities."<sup>29</sup> The term commodity is defined by Webster's as "something useful or valuable."<sup>30</sup> Business, then, can

---

<sup>27</sup> Barna, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, It's A Different World (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 32.

<sup>29</sup> "Business," Webster's.

<sup>30</sup> "Commodity," Webster's.

be defined in the following way: those activities concerned with the supplying and distribution of things useful or of value. The question this poses for the church is: Is the church engaged in an activity concerned with the supplying and distribution of things useful and valuable to people? If an affirmative response is forthcoming, then the church can be considered a business and it must either compete with other businesses or lose. According to Barna,

The church is in the business of ministry: searching out people who need the gift of acceptance, forgiveness, and eternal life that is available in knowing Jesus Christ. For the local church to be a successful business, it must impact a growing share of its market area. . . .

The more successful a church is at fulfilling people's needs, the greater are its chances for growth. Thus quantity is a consequence of quality.<sup>31</sup>

Perceiving the church as being subject to the business mandate to develop an effective marketing orientation is a given in today's society. Why must the church consciously appropriate this orientation? Peter Berger summarizes the observation:

To repeat, the crucial sociological and social-psychological characteristics of the pluralistic situation is that religion can no longer be imposed but must be marketed. It is impossible, almost a priori, to market a commodity to a population of uncoerced consumers without taking their wishes concerning the commodity into consideration. . . . In other words, in this situation it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the religious traditions as unchanging verity. Instead, the dynamics of consumer

---

<sup>31</sup> Barna, 14-17.

preference is introduced into the religious sphere.<sup>32</sup>

This orientation that recognizes the need for a marketing approach on behalf of the institutional church raises the ultimate question for the church: Is what the church has to offer better than what the world has to offer? Bishop Wilke puts it this way:

The question for the church is: Do we have an offer better than beer, better than recreation, better than drugs, better than slow suicide by TV? Do we have anything for Christians to do? Do we have work that harbors meaning? Frankly, in many church fellowships, the answer is no.<sup>33</sup>

Just what is it that the church has to offer? Or, perhaps a better question would be: What is the product(s) that the church desires to communicate to the world? This is the question that is explored in Chapter 3.

---

<sup>32</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Wilke, Signs and Wonders, 87.



## CHAPTER 3

### Product

#### The Product of Perception

What is the product the church has to offer? A question such as this can be interpreted in two ways as some inherent presuppositions formulate this question. The first is that the church has a product to offer. The second is that this product can be identified, understood and communicated to others. It is also presupposed that what the church has to offer or provide can be defined by the term product--a term that is loaded somewhat with connotations from the business world; yet, which nevertheless can be used to describe the offering, opportunity or communication presented by the church to persons.

The term product, as it is used to define what the institutional church offers to its congregations, can be understood on two levels. First, the church's product can be understood as a specific offering of tangible historical activities which the church normally calls worship services, classes, groups, choirs, studies, mission opportunities, etc. This definition is best presented in the position of marketing consultant Peter Peacock: "The church's products

are its major programs--for example, youth fellowship groups or Christian education--and the specific activities which are represented in major programs."<sup>1</sup> The second category of how the church's product can be understood is the overarching conceptual framework which the church attempts to provide for its congregations. This framework can be understood as a sense of the transcendence, an understanding of Jesus Christ, a compassion for others, a relationship with God, etc. This position is more clearly expressed by Karl Barth:

It is simply a truism that there is nothing more important, more urgent, more helpful, more redemptive, and more salutary, there is nothing, from the viewpoint of heaven or earth, more relevant to the real situation than the speaking and the hearing of the *Word of God* in the originative and regulative power of its truth, in its all-eradicating and all-reconciling earnestness, in the light that it casts not only upon time and time's confusions, but also beyond, toward the brightness of *eternity*, revealing time and eternity *through* each other and *in* each other --the Word, the *Logos*, of the Living God.<sup>2</sup>

By classifying the church's products on these two levels, there is a perception that one level may have little conscious relation to the other level which is able to be articulated. Such statements as, "We offer Bible study

---

<sup>1</sup>Peter R. Peacock, "Applying Marketing Principles to Outreach Programs," Managing Today's Church, ed. Robert N. White (Valley Forge: Judson, 1981), 85.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper/Torchbooks, 1957), 123-24.

groups to enable you to experience a sense of the transcendence," are not frequently expressed in many churches. This oversight helps form the perception that the church's tangible products (groups, fellowships, etc.) have little direct relationship to the church's intangible products (faith, compassion, etc.). A clearer understanding of how these two realms are joined together is necessary as, on a larger scale, both realms communicate an understanding of God to those with whom the church comes in contact.

According to sociologist Robert Bellah:

For a long time what have been called the "mainline" Protestant churches . . . have offered a conception of God as neither wholly other nor a higher self, but rather as involved in time and history. . . . They have tried to steer a middle course between mystical fusion with the world and sectarian withdrawal from it.<sup>3</sup>

The answer to this dilemma is the answer the church is seeking as it attempts to address how it may become more relevant to and a larger part of persons' lives in the present age. It begins with a new understanding of what is meant by the term product.

To best understand the term product, it is helpful to remember that a product is defined not solely by what something is in its own essence (not only by its physical characteristics, composition, or material), but also by the

---

<sup>3</sup>Robert N. Bellah, et al., Habits Of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (1985; reprint, New York: Harper & Row/Perennial Library, 1986), 237.

benefits it is perceived as able to provide those involved in its creation, distribution and/or consumption. In other words, something cannot be categorized as a product unless it is able to provide some type of benefit from a human perspective. With this understanding in mind, a product can best be viewed as a commodity (as something with value) as long as it is perceived as providing a benefit to those who need and/or desire it.

It is on the level of human perception that one must begin when attempting to understand the essence of the church's product. In the words of advertising consultants Al Ries and Jack Trout, "To be successful today, you must touch base with reality. And the reality that really counts is what's already in the prospect's mind."<sup>4</sup> How one perceives tangible or intangible benefits to oneself or for ones purposes which are allocated to a tangible or intangible entity is how one defines and understands a product.

In the church, it is the perception of what is being offered--the perception the congregation (or prospective congregation) has of what the church symbolizes and/or provides--which defines the product in their minds. In its simplest form, the church's product can be defined as that which one perceives to be an attribute or feature of

---

<sup>4</sup>Al Ries and Jack Trout, Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind (1981; reprint, New York: Warner Books, 1982), 5.

something tangible or intangible which the church desires someone to appropriate and which is designed to provide a benefit to the recipient. This product can be tangible: literature, sermons, potlucks, fellowship groups, worship opportunities, Bible studies, etc. Or this product can be intangible: ideas, thoughts, understandings, ways of viewing reality, etc. In the church, the intangible product takes the shape of dogmas, doctrines, interpretations, world-views, promises and proclamations which point beyond the church itself to something greater than the tangible. The tangible product of the church is essentially the means the church uses to communicate the intangible product--a vision of what (or who) is beyond the tangible.

Too often, however, the church fails to understand the relation between these two aspects of its product and focuses instead on the tangible product because the church perceives this to be measurable and provable. The tangible product can be seen, planned, controlled and mastered. A Bible study or fellowship group, a good sermon, an active outreach program, a mission project to a foreign land are all aspects of the tangible product that the church too often perceives as all it has to offer. The intangible dimension: the mystery, the ideal, the vision are subordinated to the world of rational tangibles--a world which the church finds itself unable to compete in adequately due to the powerful capitalist ideology and its

offspring of materialism. Capitalism and materialism promise to provide individuals with greater rewards than the church is able to guarantee in a convincing enough manner that its tangible products will provide. If the church simply is in the business of offering just another material product, no matter the kind of product, it is certain to suffer the same fate all products ultimately face--obsolescence. The human desire is for something ultimate, something which will never wear-out. This is the challenge for the church. It is a challenge that is not new.

According to Karl Barth:

The serious meaning of the situation in our churches is that the people want to hear the *Word*, that is, the answer to the question by which, whether they know it or not, they are actively animated, *Is it true?* . . . If we do not understand this ultimate desire, if we do *not* take the people seriously . . . at the point of their life perplexity, we need not wonder if a majority of them, without becoming enemies of the church, gradually learn to leave the church to itself and us to the kind-hearted and timid.<sup>a</sup>

A recovery of the intangible dimension of the church's product offering would enable the church to offer a product in an area that society's dominant ideology does not provide--the area of the intangible dimension of meaning--the realm where God, not humanity, claims ultimacy and is accepted as that ultimacy. The church's product as defined by these parameters can be summarized as follows:

---

<sup>a</sup>Barth, 110-11.

1. A message that proclaims that there is something greater than what we perceive.

2. An understanding that this something greater is able to be known.

3. A conviction that this something greater desires to be known.

4. A trust that this something greater has provided the means through which it can be known.

5. An orientation that life is only experienced in its fullness when this something greater is known and accepted.

6. A vision that through worship, fellowship, study, and service this something greater will be known and accepted.

In essence, the church's purpose is to provide the means (tangible commodities) through which persons can realize and appropriate a greater Product--the Product that cannot be experienced in its fulness by the sole use of ones senses--the Product ultimately to be related to, appropriated, internalized and utilized--the ultimate Product which is nothing less than the total conviction of belief in the living God as revealed in Jesus Christ. In marketing terms, the church's Product can best be defined as: The manifestation in tangible expression of an affirmation of conviction in the tangible and intangible activities of the Living God.

### The Search for the Product

As was earlier stated, a product is defined as that which is perceived as providing a benefit to satisfy some human need or desire. Humans can only understand God in terms of how God relates to them--in terms of the benefits God provides them--a concept the church has understood and labeled as grace. The church's ultimate Product can be understood as providing and celebrating a heightened awareness of this grace, an awareness of the activity of God in the midst of people's lives. The church is the instrument that provides the tools and means through which persons can grow in their relationship with this activity in all areas of life. Such an instrumental function of the church is manifested in the creation of various particular activities such as education, support groups, worship, counseling, opportunities to serve, etc.

Yet, despite these particular activities designed to enable growth to occur, they are not enough in their own right to achieve the goal of the church, to reach beyond themselves into the realm of a relationship with the church's true Product--Belief itself. An intangible aspect is necessary to accomplish the church's purpose, an aspect the church cannot create, an aspect that rests solely with a God who transcends the institutional church and who is actively involved in the daily lives of humanity. As Barth expresses it:



Man as man cries for God. He cries not for a truth, but for *Truth*; not for *something* good but for *the* good; not for answers but for the answer--the one that is identical with its own questions. Man himself is the real question, and if the answer is to be found in the *question*, he must find an answer in himself: *he* must be the answer. He does not cry for solutions, but for salvation; not for something human, but for God, for God as his Savior from *humanity*.<sup>4</sup>

Barth correctly grasps the understanding that humanity cannot and does not ultimately settle for just any answer to its deepest questions, but seeks instead the answer to life, an answer which the church has traditionally understood to be found only when one comes to accept for oneself the presence of the living God in ones life.

The institutional church at present seems to be in a holding pattern, waiting for somebody or something to set it free from its downward spiral. This is a condition that is a human problem, ultimately grounded in the desire for a God who is not only greater than an institution, but a God who is also revealed in and through human creations such as the institutional church. In the words of the late Albert Outler:

Give us a church whose members believe and understand the Gospel of God's healing love of Christ to hurting men and women. Give us a church that speaks and acts in consonance with its faith--not only to reconcile the world but to turn it upside down! Give us a church of spirit-filled people in whose fellowship life speaks to life, love to love, and faith and trust respond to God's grace. And we shall have a church whose witness

---

<sup>4</sup>Barth, 190.

in the world will not fail and whose service to the world will transform it.<sup>7</sup>

As it waits for something or somebody to provide it with the direction it seeks, the institutional church continues to offer programs, run groups and engage in ministries that are designed to bide time until the real crux happens--the progressing onto the realization of the Kingdom of God--the time when God's will will be done "on earth as in heaven." The question the church must reflect on is whether the church is presently at a point (as were the churches in the apostle Paul's time) of running out of patience for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. Is the church simply going through the motions of maintaining the machinery until a better vision comes along? According to sociologist Peter Berger,

Human existence is always oriented toward the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity. Put differently, man realizes himself in projects. An essential dimension of this "futurity" of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering.<sup>8</sup>

If the church is indeed in a waiting period, a closer look at what the church is providing those it is designed to serve during this time may prove enlightening. There are

---

<sup>7</sup>Albert C. Outler, Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), 56.

<sup>8</sup>Berger, A Rumor of Angels, 76.

many parts of the Product being offered by the church today, but few comprehensive wholes (except those wholes which many perceive to be offered by the more fundamentalist churches). What is that whole that the church should and must offer in order to justify its continuance? The answer has been discussed in a variety of ways. For Barth the answer is found in the appropriation of ultimate truth:

What people want to find out and thoroughly understand is, *Is it true?* . . . so they come to us, entering into the whole grotesque situation of Sunday morning, which is only the expression of this possibility raised to a high power. . . . They want to find out and thoroughly understand: they do not want to hear mere assertions and assertions, however fervent and enthusiastic they may be. And they want to find out and thoroughly understand the answer to this one question, *Is it true?*--and not some other answer which beats about the bush.<sup>9</sup>

For Martin Buber, the answer is found in an affirmation of relationship:

The true community does not arise through people's having feelings for one another . . . but through, first, their taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Centre, and second, their being in living mutual relation with one another.<sup>10</sup>

For United Methodist laity, the answer is being articulated in this way:

Laypeople across the denomination are crying out for help in bringing their relationship to God in focus as they live their lives in the world. They

---

<sup>9</sup>Barth, 108.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Buber, I and Thou, 2nd ed., trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958), 45.

want a spiritual base for their involvement in social action activities.<sup>11</sup>

For United Methodist clergy, an answer has been articulated by William Hinson:

People want religion with substance, intellectual and emotional. They will not settle for esoteric values, divorced from the warm, caring person of Christ. They want a warm faith with substance.<sup>12</sup>

The common element that is running throughout all of these answers is a piercing desire on the part of persons for something ultimate to believe in. Whether or not they can articulate it clearly, modern individuals are desperately seeking a relationship with a truth that is unchanging, a truth that is solid, a truth which they can hang onto in the midst of what can be considered increasing chaos. Modern individuals seek a truth which is to be found, by the Christian church's understanding, in a relationship with the living God who was revealed in the life, teachings, ministry and person of Jesus Christ.

#### The Product of Belief Itself

The desire for a relationship with God is a desire for a relationship with, not simply an understanding about the living God who was revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a relationship that is recognized not only in a study about

---

<sup>11</sup>James W. Holsinger, Jr., and Evelyn Laycock, Awaken the Giant (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 75.

<sup>12</sup>William H. Hinson, A Place to Dig In: Doing Evangelism in the Local Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 22.

the Bible, but is also strengthened through the revelation of the message of the Bible. The apostle Paul expresses such a relationship as forming the essence of the church as he writes, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27).<sup>13</sup> To be considered the church by Paul's understanding, the church must offer persons a relationship with the body of Christ. To provide this opportunity for relationship, the church must affirm that it does have the answer people are seeking; it must affirm that a relationship with Christ is the answer. The message of the church is simple: God was in Christ, Christ is in us, because of this it does make a difference in how life is experienced. The church's message affirms that there is an ultimate truth, that there is something solid to hang onto in a changing world. The church's message is a message of hope, a statement of fact as well as of faith. No timidity can be allowed in the affirmation that Jesus Christ is Christ; that through the body of Christ as a church we are new creations, that God is at work in and through the Christian church.

The church's true Product is nothing less than the tangible affirmation of conviction itself in the ongoing activities of the living God (Christ) in the midst of life. That is to say that the church's Product is the essence of

---

<sup>13</sup> All references are to the New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version, unless specified.

Belief itself. The church offers the world Belief! With this understanding, the church's message then becomes palatable, believable and relevant: step into that Belief, join the body of Christ--believe and be set free, and life will take on a new dimension of quality and richness which present reality cannot provide.

The New Testament is filled with stories of the power of belief to transform lives. The Greek term for belief is the verb pisteuo which means "to be persuaded of and hence to place confidence in, to trust."<sup>14</sup> The noun form pistis is also translated as faith or a "firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing."<sup>15</sup> Belief, therefore, is synonymous with faith. The church's ultimate Product is Belief (trust) in the living God--faith itself.

The writer of the Gospel of John provides the most powerful support of the church's Product. Belief is understood as the key to a relationship with God: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). Belief is the key to understanding God: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). Belief is the key to

---

<sup>14</sup> "Belief," Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, eds. W.E. Vine, et al. (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), 61.

<sup>15</sup> "Faith," Vine's, 222.

accepting God's grace: "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). Belief is the key to the power of the church: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). Belief is the key to happiness: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29).

The writer of John was not the only one who supported the importance of Belief. Luke expressed it this way in the book of Acts: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Paul expressed it this way in his epistles: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). The writer of Peter supported it as well: "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Belief in the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ was the only Product which the early church had to proclaim. The essence of the early church's message was that Belief (whole-hearted trust of ones entire will) in God was the

answer to life's ultimate questions. As J. Christiaan Beker in his commentary on Paul writes,

The two moments within the one process of coming to faith, that is, *reception* and *acceptance* (= appropriation), are clearly distinguished in 1 Thess. 2:13. "When you *received* the word of God which you heard from us, you *accepted* it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God." Likewise, in 1 Cor. 15:1-5 the elements of tradition and gospel can not only be distinguished but can be fused as well: "The gospel which you *received*," is the gospel "in which you *also stand*." Receiving is indeed the guarantee of salvation. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Even today, the stimulation of and nurture of Belief is the essential purpose of the church. For without such a purpose, the church loses its focus and its unique message of relevancy and hope. The church in its very essence is designed to enable, support and share Belief with the present age. Church consultant Lyle Schaller articulates the outcome of such an undertaking:

Perhaps the most common characteristic of the churches that are attracting increasing numbers of people today is not where the minister is on the theological spectrum or the denominational affiliation, but on what people hear and feel during the worship experience. This is a note of hope. . . . In very simple terms the most important single factor in increasing worship attendance is to present the Good News as good news.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (1980; reprint, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 123.

<sup>17</sup>Schaller, 44 Ways, 23-4.



Such an affirmation of Belief must be appropriated by the church with strong conviction. The church must have ownership of its own Product. If the church is to persuasively communicate that its message is true and helpful, it must believe in its message. Such an affirmation can be nothing less than highly contagious, it communicates to persons a sense of supreme truth which enables them to feel that what they are experiencing and hearing in worship is important, meaningful, sacred. The church must ask itself whether it truly believes that its message is valid. Is Christ alive today? Is the living God trustworthy? Is belief in God truly necessary for salvation to be experienced by the individual (as well as by society) in this life in the present age? The only response that will enable the church to reclaim the power of its Product is an affirmation of conviction: yes, the church's message is valid; yes, Christ is alive; yes, God is trustworthy; yes, humans can experience life in its fulness if they truly come to believe in and respond to the living God.

It is the belief that Belief does matter, that Belief does make a difference, that Christ does affect the quality of life through Belief itself that is the message of the church. The church's Product and its conviction are identical--belief in the church's conviction that God is the answer is Belief; belief in the revelation of God's love in Christ is Belief. Belief in the ongoing action of God in

the world through the Holy Spirit is Belief. Belief is a self-fulfillment of its own essence. A church that believes that its primary Product is Belief itself, ultimately perpetuates a ceaseless enthusiasm as the process feeds itself. Belief nourishes faith which strenghtens the proclamation of Belief which encourages additional joy and reaffirmation of that faith. This cycle, when taken to its pinnacle, results in a stronger relationship with the Product itself and the reception of the benefits of the Product--the assurance one possesses which is brought about through ones affirmation of a relationship with the living God.

In traditional church language, if perception of reality is what matters to the individual, once that perception has been carried up in Belief itself, it merges with that ultimate conviction which emanates from the ultimate Source itself and manifests itself as a new perception of reality, one which carries with it the assurance of salvation to the believer. The writer of the Gospel of John expresses it this way, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Either there is truth in these words that have been accepted by the Christian church as providing the essence of its faith or else the Christian faith is founded on a

theological orientation that is unbelievable, and therefore, unable to provide the benefit (eternal life) it promises.

If belief in God through Christ does not provide eternal life, then the church is faced with a challenge to prove by some other means its legitimacy for existing. What is the implication of this condition? If the church's Product is inherently flawed because it is a product which is unable to be supported or believed by those inside the church, is the church then able to stand behind its Product with the conviction necessary for it to be perceived as valuable and competitive in the environment which exists outside the church? The conviction of the merits of a product precedes the proclamation of the benefits of the product. The conviction of the truth of the church's message, which is grounded in Belief, precedes the proclamation of the gospel message--there is no other way for the message to be communicated without the force of integrity and belief itself behind it.

Out of the church's Product come the answers that can and will address the ultimate needs of society, the answers that can and will provide relevance to persons, the answers that can and will rekindle the enthusiasm in the church. The benefits God provides humanity with through Belief are proclamations of the church's Product itself, all summarized by the one word--Belief.

### The Need for the Product of Belief

There is a commonly held theological understanding that the church is entrusted to develop and implement those means which help strengthen the human response to the relationship offered by God through Christ by meeting the needs of persons at their deepest levels. Such human needs are inherently relational in their essence. Faith, then, is formed and strengthened in relationship. This understanding is echoed in a variety of ways in current church renewal literature. Out of the research conducted by Gordon Jackson and Phyllisee Foust Jackson, six human needs were identified as motivators toward faith:

1. The need to cope with lived experience, especially crisis.
2. The need for intimate spiritual friends.
3. The need to be accepted.
4. The need to define oneself.
5. The need to express the self.
6. The need for ultimacy.<sup>10</sup>

The means through which these needs can be met are relational on both a horizontal (person-to-person) as well as a horizontal/vertical (person-to-God) level. The power which enables these relationships to be established has been traditionally understood by the Christian church as the

---

<sup>10</sup> Jackson and Jackson, 49-64.

grace of God. Grace has been understood as a freely offered gift by God that may be accepted or rejected by human decision. Such grace can be experienced on both relational levels: it can be offered by God through human means, or it can be offered by God without human means. A human action, however, of accepting that grace (in the Wesleyan concept) results in the gift of faith. Yet such an action of accepting grace itself is a statement of Belief--one must believe that one will receive faith if one trusts in the grace of God. It is therefore Belief itself (from the human side) on which is founded the relationship for full life in Christ offered as grace (from the divine side). For if one truly believes in the living God, if one truly believes that the spirit of Christ is at work today, then one is open to the reception of greater amounts of God's grace and ones life and relationships must be transformed as a result.

Yet grace itself must precede the human response or else a works-righteousness understanding results. Even the perception that God acts first in the salvation process is an aspect of the affirmation of belief which must be grounded in God's initial grace. In Wesleyan terms this type of grace is understood as prevenient grace. Such grace enables one to freely choose to accept or to reject belief in God. In this sense, a person is not strengthened in a relationship with God by belief apart from grace, but is strengthened through the exercising of human freedom by

choosing to respond in the affirmative to that grace, by believing in the Giver of that grace.

If the affirmation of grace in the manifestation of active believing is not required for a strengthening of ones relationship with God, then there is no human response necessary in the salvation process and the entire matter rests squarely with God. This type of understanding has been called predestination as it essentially removes the human element in the salvation process. If there is no need for a human response to God's grace, then grace is not something that is designed to transform human life through the exercising of human freedom. If grace cannot transform human life, then Belief itself is meaningless and the church's mission to promote and to enable Belief is purposeless. If the means which are developed to help stimulate and nurture Belief are directionless activities, then the church itself has no transcendent dimension and essentially has no unique product beyond what other institutions in society offer as their tangible products.

Without affirming the power of grace as experienced in its fullest expression when appropriated through Belief, the church loses the power of its claim for its unique Product and is simply relegated to the level of a social action institution which points solely to worldly development as the definition of the Kingdom of God. If this is the case, the church has essentially reduced its purpose for existing

to simply offering another tangible commodity to choose from among the many offered by society. This results in the church competing with other businesses in society who offer products which promise similar benefits as the church is able to claim for its secular activities. The difference is that on this level of competition, the church is simply considered another business which offers only tangible benefits and is quickly outmarketed, outpromoted and outspent by businesses whose entire financial existence depend on using marketing and advertising successfully to win more time and money from the church's potential members.

In the midst of this competitive environment the church, without a transcendent dimension to its Product, becomes lost in the promotional race and essentially suffers from a lack of relevance to those who struggle with ultimate meaning and purpose in life, and who long for faith, hope and love in an intangible, transcendent power which is greater than the tangible creations of the world. If the church's product is simply tangible and it loses the battle in the marketplace because other tangible products are perceived to provide greater benefit, then the church must ask itself what makes the institutional church a necessity in today's world.

The church must reclaim the primacy of Belief if it is to be relevant to the modern age. A view of the church's mission as essentially political or focused on the church's

involvement in worldly development may provide greater enjoyment for future generations, but when such a view becomes primary for the church's self-definition, it cannot provide the ultimate meaning and depth of fulfillment in life for the present generation. A Christ who can meet the crises that face humanity both socially and individually today, and not only at some vague time in the future, is the Christ whom the church must reclaim, affirm and offer to the present age. This is the Christ of Belief. Current church-growth literature reflects this understanding. According to John Westerhoff:

We can't ignore the obvious: There simply is no Christianity without Christ. To be Christian the church must affirm Jesus Christ as Lord. Christianity does not exist merely whenever humanity is realized. Humanity is realized outside Christianity. . . . Christianity only exists where the memory of this Christ is alive and his presence made real day by day in the being--the thought, feeling, and action--of persons and their community of faith.<sup>19</sup>

This feeling is being echoed among United Methodist laity as they express that "without developing the spiritual base of our lives, attempts at correcting social ills commonplace in our world become simply humanism."<sup>20</sup> To be relevant, the church must provide today's world with the answers to its quest for meaning and purpose, not with a

---

<sup>19</sup>John H. Westerhoff III, Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal (New York: Seabury, 1979), 5.

<sup>20</sup>Holsinger and Laycock, 75.



ceaseless barrage of reformulations of the questions. The church must take a stand and affirm the truth of Belief. The church cannot be relevant to modern society solely on a social level; it will only reclaim its priority when it enables individuals to appropriate Belief with such conviction that they internalize an assurance of ultimate meaning and purpose. According to Peter Berger:

Since the socially significant "relevance" of religion is primarily in the private sphere, consumer preference reflects the "needs" of this sphere. This means that religion can more easily be marketed if it can be shown to be "relevant" to private life than if it is advertised as entailing specific application to the large public institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Many would interpret this understanding as perhaps anti-Christian because of its individualistic orientation; nevertheless, the reality of the human situation today is such that unless organized religion, as experienced in the institutional church, is able to provide ways to satisfy the deeper needs found in the individual, it will continue to receive less priority in the fast-paced lives of a society functioning under the ideology of capitalism, which provides the answers persons seek in a lesser, incomplete, but seemingly acceptable way. To many in society, the message that "money does buy happiness" is the answer to the daily struggles of life. Unless organized religion can offer the

---

<sup>21</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 147.

individual a stronger message, it will continue to lose the battle with secular forces.

The message for the church is clear. The basic fundamental foundations of Belief must be appropriated and believed by the church or the whole system of organized religion falls apart. Either God's grace does exist or there is no Christ. Either Christ exists or there is no Christian church. Either humans can accept or reject God's grace, or there is no freewill. Either grace, when accepted in faith, strengthens Belief, and is itself enabled by Belief, or there is no such thing as faith. In essence, the fundamental foundations of the church are grounded in the a priori necessity of Belief. This forms the conviction and affirmation of the church. This is the church's Product!

The church's Product is a product which can only result in a contagious joy if it is truly believed, owned and trusted. Such a joy can be manifested in a variety of expressions: righteous indignation at social ills, enthusiasm for sharing the gospel message, acts of love and compassion, an inner feeling of assurance, etc. All of these expressions serve to strengthen the appropriation of the Product itself. The result of this appropriation is an assurance, a certainty that God exists, that Christ is alive in the world, that life does have purpose and meaning and hope, that love is the way Belief is truly manifested in the

world. Belief affirms the ultimate answer that persons are seeking.

### Shifting the Paradigm

Belief comes about and is strengthened only as it is articulated and developed in contact with the world. From this primary Product, all particular ministries of the church are developed to stimulate, to maintain, or to increase ownership of Belief itself. Questions to be considered at this point are: How does one maximize Belief? How does one stimulate the contagious joy that must be a natural outgrowth if such Belief is truly believed and appropriated? The development of church ministries are the instruments through which Belief is strengthened. This understanding provides the overarching theological framework for the church. All particular objectives such as helping realize the Kingdom of God, the development of disciples, loving and caring for the poor and needy are subservient to and derivations of the product of Belief itself.

A Christian orientation, by definition, cannot be a new form of legalistic duty to humanity or a must-do affirmation of a particular form of social action; rather, the possession of true Belief itself is a merging of the will of the individual with the will of God. If one truly believes in God and truly believes God, then the specifics of how that Belief manifests itself are developed in an attitude of trust and faith. Conviction is contagious if such a

conviction is true and is powerfully felt. Many of the mainline churches seem to have lost this element of contagious joy that must permeate a true trust and conviction in Belief itself.

The affirmation of Belief is contagious if one truly understands that Belief is not a quasi-truth but the essence of truth itself. God is belief-able. The Christian message affirms that if one believes and responds in such belief, God's grace is made manifest to that person in such a way that joy and dedication, service and conviction are the natural outgrowths. Such an expression of this conviction can be best seen in the lives of those we call the saints of the church--those persons who radiate joy and enthusiasm in their very person as they go about the tasks of the church and their daily lives in general. Nothing can stifle the Product if it is appropriated in faith.

This concept is perhaps somewhat difficult to grasp unless one looks at the Christian martyrs of the first and second centuries. Something so possessed them with joy that they voluntarily were willing to die rather than to renounce their Belief. Such an affirmation of conviction is the essence of Belief, it is how Belief manifests itself in the lives of the believer. It is not that persons have to be willing to die to prove their belief, but that the conviction of Belief itself empowers the person with the ability and willingness to move forward doing the will of

God. This has been the historical Christian message that must again be reaffirmed in order for the church's Product to reclaim its priority in the lives of persons.

On the basis of this definition of the church's Product what then is the church's present ministry to its congregations and to the world, and what must the church be able to provide in order to be brought into the daily lives of persons? This question strikes at the essence of modern-day evangelism and demands that an answer be sought outside the realm of present church-growth literature. A perceptual paradigm shift is necessary.

When a paradigm shift is considered in how the church defines itself in relation to the Product it is perceived to offer, what ultimately results is a flux of criticisms and denials directed to the one proposing the paradigm shift. This appears to be for two reasons. First, it is a new approach to the church's self-understanding. Second, it identifies the church in the language and symbolism of business--a combination that is unacceptable to some of the opinion that the church is inherently viewed as against culture, rather than involved in the process of transforming culture.

It is my contention that, while not strictly adhering to the idea that "If one cannot beat them, join them," I suggest that the church must work from within what is considered the perceived reality of the masses--the

framework from which they judge life--the perception flavored by the overarching ideological umbrella of capitalism. Only by entering the world of the competition--challenging those products that society and ideology offer that compete with the church's message of Belief--can the church begin to reclaim its centrality and authority. By staying outside the reality in which persons live, the church effectively keeps its Product on the superficial level--offering more Bible studies to the uninterested, offering choir to persons who cannot sing, offering fellowship groups in direct competition to "happy hours" and company recreation programs. Social ethicist Harvey Seifert expresses it this way:

A considerable reservoir of able leaders remains unused because they are never invited to contribute on the level of their highest competence. We ask those who professionally are specialist in organizational development to usher, or we ask political activists in labor unions to sing in the choir.<sup>22</sup>

The church must realize that if it wants to connect with the lives of persons where they are at, it can only do so if it creates ministries which are grounded in its understanding of the ultimacy of its Product, and which take into account how that Product can be understood, appropriated and applied in the context in which persons live. The means through which this communication challenge

---

<sup>22</sup> Harvey Seifert, New Power for the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 150.

for the church can be addressed in a capitalistic society is the marketing paradigm.

#### Obstacles to the Paradigm

The proposing of an alternative paradigm to understanding the church carries with it an inherent propensity for criticism, especially when such a paradigm has the power to hold the church accountable for its own theological proclamations. One of the biggest challenges for the United Methodist Church in the United States is how to enable the financially well-off to be more aware of and responsive to the real demands of Christian stewardship. If the church attempts to affirm too powerfully that its Product will result in a transformed life which includes the possibility that one may need to sacrifice ones cherished possessions for others, the church risks alienating its middle and upper-middle class membership. The tendency is for the church to attempt to soft-pedal its message so as not to be so offensive as to alienate persons and lose members. Berger expresses the dilemma this way:

All religious institutions oriented toward the upper-middle class market in America will be under pressure to secularize and to psychologize their products--otherwise, the chances of their being "bought" diminish drastically.<sup>23</sup>

The church is faced with a problem. If the church's Product, as understood by the paradigm, is not marketable to

---

<sup>23</sup> Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 148.

the haves as well as to the have-nots in such a way that the haves are able to take ownership of the Product, then Belief is only able to be appropriated by the financially oppressed, and the church becomes a meaningless guilt-trap to the reality of the rest of society which comfortably lives in a capitalistic culture. What the church will continue to experience is an ever-decreasing church membership and an ultimate lessening of financial resources unless it can generate ways to develop particular ministries that reflect the attributes and benefits of appropriating the Product for all persons--rich as well as poor, and which connect with those persons on an emotional, physical, spiritual, as well as psychological level. Without this ability, the institutional mainline church is doomed to continue its downward spiral. The church must find ways of enabling the appropriation of the Product and the strengthening of the relationship with the Product by all persons, for that is the church's primary function. In the words of Richard Wilke:

The church is designed to minister to us from cradle to casket, not only to convert our self-centeredness into Christ-centeredness, but also to help us grow, put us to work, nourish us through life's ups and downs, feed us with the sacraments, and send us home to God amid the songs of the saints.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Wilke, Signs and Wonders, 111.



The next obstacle that must be addressed is how this process is enabled. How does the church design specific ministries that are reflective of the greater Product and yet connect with relevance to the lives of a variety of economic, racial and ethnic groups? How does the church generate ministries that can reach to persons' ultimate needs--not simply to the needs the church assumes are persons' ultimate needs? These questions have been addressed in a variety of current church-growth literature. According to Willimon and Wilson,

When the United Methodist Publishing House made earnest attempts to listen to the laity and to ask them what type of resources they needed in their Christian education class rooms, it responded by producing what the "customers" asked for, and sales of official United Methodist curricula increased.<sup>25</sup>

Business consultant Peter Peacock makes a similar observation from a business perspective:

In contrast with the old "sell 'em what you got" philosophy, today's sophisticated business marketers know that their chances of success are far greater if they find out exactly what consumers want and then produce products and services to fulfill those wants.<sup>26</sup>

As applied to the church, Peacock's observation provides an interesting conclusion:

Indeed, we will go so far as to state that, relative to churches in general, marketing-oriented churches are more sensitive than other churches to the needs of the members of the

---

<sup>25</sup>Willimon and Wilson, 107.

<sup>26</sup>Peacock, 83.

congregation as well as to the needs of other groups with which churches interact.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that the church can best meet the demand to be relevant to its membership if it asks them what they want from the church. While this is essentially a very elementary marketing approach, there are some theological difficulties inherent in this process. The following sketch is generalized and it is acknowledged that contextual differences do manifest themselves; however, a general outline of the process by which many churches presently develop their specific ministries may shed some insight into the problems with the marketing paradigm as understood from solely a product level:

1. The church planning groups gather and brainstorm about some programs to offer to fill the slots that are opening up in education or membership care or adult studies for the coming quarter, season or year.

2. The church clergy and staff discuss the lack of effective Bible studies and the need for exciting alternatives in programming.

3. An idea is raised that a survey of the desires by the congregation will generate some good topical ideas for programs. A topical survey card or questionnaire is then created. Such a survey generally asks questions like:

"Check which of the following areas you would like to have

---

<sup>27</sup> Peacock, 81.

more programs offered: Family Issues, Bible, Social Ethics, Mission, Spiritual Growth, etc."

4. The survey is conducted, the responses gathered, the programs are developed, events are scheduled, few people show up, the new programs are abandoned, the church reverts to what has worked in the past, but for some reason such activities are not as effective in the present.

While this may be a very generalized sketch of the process a congregation goes through in developing its specific products (ministries), it nevertheless contains the elements that are altogether necessary for success. The problem is that these elements are not organized in a manner that is designed to compete with the educated consumer in today's society. The modern-day church member is bombarded with advertising messages for "new and improved" products thousands of times daily, while the church continues to offer the same old products--admittedly, newer versions--but nevertheless, the same old products in disguise. Such a condition results in the church being viewed as non-innovative and boring.

It is at this point that an analysis of what constitutes the competitive advantage of the church's Product is necessary and an analysis of the value of the Product is warranted. It is simply not enough to source the needs and desires of the congregation. The church is not in business to solely provide products persons want; it also

must provide the ultimate Product persons need. The challenge is how to identify and market the value of the church's ultimate Product as it develops particular expressions which are derivative of that Product. If the goal is to stimulate the appropriation of Belief, how this is accomplished begins with the value the church places on its ultimate Product and how this value is communicated to the body of the church. This is the content of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

## Price

Essentials of Competitive Value

The church today is finding itself thrown into a competitive environment composed of a variety of seemingly equally valuable products from which persons can selectively appropriate depending on their desires and needs. This is a condition for which the church has not been prepared since it has enjoyed a degree of autonomy in the religious realm and has had a clearly defined position in society throughout much of its history.

With the plurality of religious expressions prevalent in American society today and the fact that there is no widely accepted religious orientation that can force itself upon the masses, even the Christian understanding of the church universal is unable to claim priority in the lives of persons. The church can no longer claim that it ultimately dominates the way people are allowed to articulate their struggle with meaning and purpose in life. Such a struggle is now undertaken in the secular realm of competition where the institutional church is one alternative among many through which people can attempt to come to grips with the something greater.

The United Methodist Church is engaged in what could be considered the battle for religious primacy and relevancy. It is a battle in which all denominations, religions, philosophies and ideologies are participating; a battle which is taking place in a common marketplace--the hearts and minds of the American public. Peter Berger describes this condition:

The competitive market is established once it has become impossible to utilize the political machinery of the society for the elimination of religious rivals. The forces of the market then tend toward a system of free competition very similar to that of *laissez-faire* capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

The United Methodist Church's response to this competitive environment is to attempt to position its Product as a valid alternative from among the many the individual can select. To accomplish this, the church's Product must be perceived as possessing a degree of worth and value by those for whom it is destined to be appropriated. Since the church cannot force its Product on the individual (for to do so would violate the church's theological understanding of grace and human freedom), the church's product of Belief itself must possess an inherent value attached to it which is enticeable enough for the individual to desire the Product. If such value is not perceived as a part of the Product, the church essentially does not possess what can be defined as a product which can

---

<sup>1</sup>Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 141-2.

be marketed to society and, therefore, the church cannot compete with relevancy in the capitalistic realm in which it finds itself today.

In the midst of a society that advocates individual freedom of decision as an inherent part of its dominant ideology, one must be allowed the freedom to either accept or reject opportunities. Once a decision is made, the individual is then held accountable for the outcomes of the decision. According to Heilbroner,

Under a wage labor system workers are entirely free to enter or leave the work relationship they wish. They cannot be forced or dragooned into work or compelled to stay at work if they wish to quit. In the eyes of many conservative theorists, it is this contractual right of refusal . . . that constitutes the essential political foundation of capitalism and, beyond that, its essential justification as a moral order.<sup>2</sup>

If there is no value attached to the acceptance of, affirmation of, confirmation of, or appropriation of Belief, then Belief itself lacks the ability to be selected as a desirable product in the ideological world of capitalism, and becomes irrelevant to the lives of persons whom the church hopes to attract as a fulfillment of its own belief in its Product. Simply stated, if the church's Product has no value, the church itself has no value when judged by the standards of competitive society, and the church is perceived as attempting to sell society an inferior concept,

---

<sup>2</sup>Heilbroner, 66.

an intangible promise and a perceivably unreal product. Society has no choice but to reject such a non-existent offering for such an offering does not fit within the reality that defines the rules by which even the church must function.

To meet this ideological challenge, the church must unabashedly affirm that Belief in God is the answer to the human desire for meaning and purpose. To accomplish this, the church must acknowledge that Belief itself has value and worth, and is something to be cherished, sought after and shared. If this value is to be perceived as inherently deriving from Belief itself, this value must be the same value which was revealed in the orientation toward Belief that was seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. H. Richard Niebuhr explains,

For Jesus there is no other finally love-worthy being, no other ultimate object of devotion, than God: He is the Father; there is none good save God: He alone is to be thanked; His kingdom alone is to be sought.<sup>3</sup>

Anything less than an a priori acknowledgement of the value of Belief in God as the ultimate Product that connects with the deepest levels of daily human existence, will necessarily result in a devaluation of the church, a perception that Belief in God really does not matter, and a lack of participation in the activities designed to

---

<sup>3</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper/Torchlight, 1956), 36.



stimulate and nurture such Belief. If the church does not establish the value of its own Product at the highest level, the church will succumb to the competitive realm of capitalism without putting up a fair fight, and will, therefore, not be perceived as worth what its Product must be worth if Christ has any value whatsoever to human existence. Robert Heilbroner explains this aspect of the ideology under which the church finds itself:

In the idealized representation of capitalism as "economics," the capitalist becomes a personage without any power whatsoever, forced to accept the costs and price levels imposed by market processes over which he has no control.<sup>4</sup>

While the church is not to be equated with a capitalist, the church is affected by the market forces at work. The church has little coercive control over the value society places on its Product and must either satisfy the needs (however deep, spiritual, social, psychological, etc.) of its potential prospects or it will lose the competitive battle. The argument that God is on the side of the church does not carry too much weight in this realm. A church that cannot compete will not continue to exist.

There are two alternatives the church may pursue in articulating the priority of its Product to society. By marketing theory, either the value of the product must be raised or the cost of the product to the consumer must be

---

<sup>4</sup>Heilbroner, 62.

lowered. By the first alternative, the product is more likely to be perceived as beneficial, trustworthy and desirable; by the second, the product is more likely to be perceived as cheap, unreliable and of little quality.

The church cannot offer its Product at a discount and affirm its conviction in what that Product is worth. If the church attempts to do so, it will suffer from an image problem as both its Product and itself (as the distributor of that Product) are perceived as worth little value. If the church is perceived as valueless because its Product is perceived as valueless, the church must seriously consider whether it is faithfully meeting its purpose for existence. What the church must ask itself is whether it agrees with and truly appropriates what is expressed by the apostle Paul when he says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:15-16). If the church does not hold highly the value of its Product and proclaim the value of that Product with the outgrowth of passion and enthusiasm that Belief must possess at its deepest levels, then the church does not really have ownership of its own Product and cannot hope to communicate to others the contagious joy that naturally must arise if one truly believes in the Product. H. Richard Niebuhr expresses it this way,

The counterpart of trust in the value-center is loyalty or fidelity. Trust is, as it were, the

passive aspect of the faith relation. It is expressed in praise or confessed in a creed that states the self-evident principle. Loyalty or faithfulness is the active side. It values the center and seeks to enhance its power and glory. It makes that center its cause for which to live and labor.<sup>5</sup>

The institutional church is made up of individuals who, by definition, are supposed to believe in God; they are supposed to possess the Product itself. If they do not believe, then the church is composed of non-believers and must examine itself to determine if it really can be considered the church by definition. Should not the individuals who possess a true belief in God be passionately filled with a deeply grounded joy? Should not enthusiasm--even controlled enthusiasm for the sake of order--so permeate the institutional church that the joy expressed to those inside and outside its boundaries is infectiously contagious? And yet, in many of the churches there is a noted lack of enthusiasm and joy manifesting themselves in actions and attitudes. The question must be raised: Does the institutional church really believe in the God it claims?

One of the criticisms which is increasingly more common in the church today is the articulation that volunteer work in and for the church is a drudgery, a duty, and a necessary

---

<sup>5</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays (New York: Harper & Row/Torchbooks, 1970), 18.

evil which one must undertake to maintain ones standing in the church. Under this orientation, volunteerism is viewed as an obligation instead of as a joyful response by those supposedly in possession of the church's Product. Does joy exist in our churches? If ministering to persons is non-joyful, boring and unsatisfying, then why should persons desire to participate in such activities which ultimately cannot compete with the more perceivably need-satisfying alternatives offered by society?

Is the church willing to seriously ask itself whether Belief in God manifests itself primarily in lackluster worship, dull living and passionless expression, or in rekindling joy and enthusiasm in the lives of individuals? Does the church affirm a message that a life filled with joy, meaning and purpose results from one being grateful for being allowed to merge into the essence of the very answer one has been seeking, and then sharing that answer with others? Zig Ziglar summarizes this line of questioning by stating that "you cannot give away something you do not possess . . . the love and respect you should give to others is something you must have within yourself." This is the first law of successful marketing--one must believe in the product. If ones product is Belief itself, then one must believe that one has a degree of ownership in oneself of the product of Belief. In short, the church must believe in itself in order to begin the process of evangelism or to

undertake the steps necessary to stimulate passion and enthusiasm which ultimately translate into church growth.

The church's fundamental foundation for supporting its mission in relation to Christ is to believe in itself. If Christ is indeed the foundation of the Christian church, then the church must live out its existence grounded in the trust of, the belief in, and the submission to Christ. T.A. Kantonen clarifies this understanding:

If Christ is in fact the Head and the church his body, then its thought and activity must be determined by him and he must be allowed to use its members as the head uses the members of the body. Then its life must be none other than Christ himself going forth to achieve his redeeming purpose. Its voice must be the voice of Christ proclaiming his eternal gospel. Its hands must be Christ's hands doing his works of love. Christ himself must look through our eyes, walk in our steps, love through our hearts. To describe the church as the body of Christ is to describe the church as living out the meaning of Christian stewardship.<sup>6</sup>

With Christ as the foundation of the church, a foundation which is the essence of Belief itself, what is the value of such a liberating affirmation of Belief? How much would one be willing to pay to possess that assurance-- that feeling or sense that everything is ultimately okay, that life will work out, that there is something more? How much is such an affirmation worth? The answer has been articulated in the form of a theological foundation of

---

<sup>6</sup>T.A. Kantonen, A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1956), 79.

Christian stewardship. As Kantonen writes,

God's relation to his world is revealed in the heart of the gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave." As absolute owner of the universe God is not a shylock who hoards what he has and harshly demands his pound of flesh. He is a loving father who holds nothing back from his children. . . . To give and to keep on giving is the essential nature of God who is love. Love can never be closed-lipped or tightfisted. It is impelled by the very character of its being to impart, to share, to sacrifice, to give. Christian giving can therefore never be an occasional performance or a special ceremony. It is the normal, steady, and increasing outflow of life in God.<sup>7</sup>

The value of the church's Product is nothing less than exacting the price of ones entire being in response. The appropriation of Belief in God carries with it a giving of ones self for the service of God in every aspect of daily life. This is the value the church must affirm as inherently a part of its Product if Belief is to maintain its integrity as it is communicated by human efforts.

#### The Presentation of Product Value

In the previous section, the value of the Product has been identified and defended. The question addressed in this section is how to present the value of the Product in such a way that enables it to be accepted; that stimulates demand for the Product; that increases the value one feels for the Product, and that generates the desirability of the Product to others.

---

<sup>7</sup>Kantonen, 40-41.

In marketing and economics, the concept of supply and demand permeates the pricing strategy of most products. Given an entirely free economy, a product is most highly valued if the demand is strong and the supply is limited for a given product. In much the same way, a product is valued less if demand is low and availability of the product is plentiful. From this basic economic understanding, one can see how a product's value depends on the product's availability and desirability. This is an observation the church can utilize in establishing its own product value.

At a basic theological understanding, God's grace is perceived and understood by the church as something that is freely given--unconditional love. Given the economic theory previously explained, a product (grace) that is available to all unconditionally can be expressed as a product of which there is a great supply (God's grace is unlimited). Yet, whenever a product floods a market such that everyone can have the product equally without any differentiation between those who can have and those who cannot have the product, the value of the product itself is depreciated by the marketplace. Is grace itself affected by such a theory? An example of the devaluation of a perceivably unlimited product may provide an answer.

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to view supply/demand economics at work is seen in the current abuse of natural resources such as air and water prevalent in America today.

These freely-given products of nature are perceived to be so available to all that the value attributed to them does not radically affect the human usage of these products. A perception that air is all around and that nobody has to earn the right to have air is an attitude that manifests itself in an abuse of the resource itself.

Economic theory affirms that a product which is perceivably abundant will have little economic value until the availability of that product becomes limited. Until the natural resources of clean air and water are on the verge of extinction, humans will continue to justify their abuse of those resources through believing that as long as such resources are available to all in unlimited quantities, they are available to all to be used (and abused) as desired. Even the realization that such freely given products can be exhausted does not supercede the idea that they are available to all and free for the using. The products are perceived as cheap and easily accessible, holding little perceived value, even though they form the very foundation on which human life survives. The question this scenario raises for the church is: How much more abundant is God's grace than clean air and water?

Under the capitalist ideology, value is allocated to a product based upon its utilitarian use in the process of acquiring more desirable products, or upon the perceived enjoyment of the product in the mind of the owner. When the



product is freely given (such as grace), that product is only valued to the extent it is perceived to provide something beneficial to the one who is asked to appropriate it. If the acquisition of the product does not provide the recipient with the desired and expected benefits, the value of the product is lessened in the mind of the recipient and the product itself is less treasured, less desired and less relied upon to provide the benefits the recipient desires. Such a condition is clearly illustrated in the devaluation of God's grace which has occurred in today's society; it is a condition which plagues even the institutional church itself.

The Christian church has based its theology on an understanding that God's grace is freely given--an understanding which concurs with the traditional definition of grace. However, the liberal church has effectively equated the freely given grace of God with the free acceptance of that grace by the human recipient. In other words, the church has said that God's grace is not only freely given, but it is also freely received. In summary, the liberal church has so freely given away the grace of God that it can no longer attest to the fact that grace does have a great value. Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the term cheap grace to express this devaluation of grace communicated by the church.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. . . . Cheap grace

is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.<sup>6</sup>

In a society that is dominated by a capitalist ideology, the value of grace can only be understood in terms of the benefits such grace provides. The question the church has apparently not addressed to the satisfaction of the majority of American society is: If grace is a product that is so freely given and is so widely available, where is the need for the institutional church? The church faces a two-fold dilemma: it must find a way to make itself perceived as necessary for the reception of its product, and it must somehow make the reception of its product something perceived as valuable, something to be respected and appreciated.

This understanding is a difficult concept for the church to consider because on the surface it makes God out to be the producer of a consumer commodity. Yet, in today's society, the question must be asked whether God is actually perceived as simply another commodity given the message of the church: that God provides grace to all of creation; that such grace is freely given; that one cannot earn a larger

---

<sup>6</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, revised ed., trans. R.H. Fuller, (1949; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1963), 45-7.

share of that grace, and that all one has to do is to accept that grace and eternal life is immediately granted.

The majority of American society looks upon the Christian church's message with incredulity (if church attendance is any indication). The message of the church does not seem to connect with reality as such under the American capitalist ideology. Anything that is entirely free has no value under this system. Even the most expensive Christmas gift is subject to greater devaluation than if one had invested one's own hard-earned money in acquiring it. What the church is currently experiencing is the effect of this attitude that the God's grace (and the institutional church) does not demand very much from the individual. Bonhoeffer experienced a similar condition in his time.

The price we are having to pay today in the shape of the collapse of the organized church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost. We gave away the word and sacrament wholesale, we baptized, confirmed, and absolved a whole nation unasked and without condition."

The message of the Christian church that grace is entirely free runs counter to perceived reality and logic, and no matter the deeper theological intentions of such a message, the appropriation of that message by society is not being accomplished in the manner the church desires. The

---

"Bonhoeffer, 58.

problem facing the church is to discover ways to recover the value of the Product in the minds of the people. To address this concern, a two-fold approach to establishing the value of the church's Product is recommended--a model which is perhaps best seen in the analogy of the traditional horse and carriage.

#### The Positioning of Value

It was discovered somewhere long ago that there were two effective ways to prompt a horse to pull a carriage or wagon. First, by using a negative influence, a whip or switch, which would inflict a slight discomfort on the rear-end of the animal which was often enough to set the horse in motion. Soon the horse was well-enough trained that the mere crack of the whip would be enough to start the horse walking. The second way to prompt a horse to move forward was by dangling a carrot on a string from the end of a pole in front of the horse's nose just out of reach. The horse would try to nibble at the carrot, strain forward and walk toward the carrot, hence the carriage moved forward. The first method of negative influence was a way to force compliance, the second was a way to coax compliance. Both ways resulted in the carriage moving forward.

The analogy of the horse and carriage provides a means for understanding the marketing attempts by the institutional church throughout its history to attract persons to participate in the life and ministry of the

church. As it sought to accomplish its goals, the church historically presented the gospel message as either something to be feared and obeyed or as a kind of an enticing treasure which promised wonderful rewards. One way was the way of Hellfire and brimstone, the other, the way of persuasive coaxing.

Today, these two marketing techniques which are designed to move persons to appropriate the Product are still visible in most denominations in one form or another; yet, both methods described are incomplete in their attempt to address the problem presently facing the institutional church. The first method--invoking punitive measures if one does not appropriate the church's Product--limits the freedom of the individual to choose to respond to God's grace by their own power without coercion by the church. The second way--persuasive coaxing--treats the church's Product as a commodity which the church attempts to woo persons to appropriate whether or not the product can be proven to live up to its promises. Neither method is entirely acceptable if, as in the United Methodist Church, one values both the validity of the gospel and its appeal, and the freedom of the individual to accept or reject God's grace. A new model is necessary for the present age. Martin Carlson expresses this need as he comments on Erich Fromm:

[For] any society to function well, its members must acquire the kind of character that makes them

*want to act in the way they have to act as members of society or of a group within it. They have to desire what objectively is necessary for them to do. Inner compulsion replaces outer force and this by the particular kind of human energy that is channeled into character traits.*<sup>10</sup>

The church has historically affirmed that the development of personal character is most effectively influenced when one lives a life of faithful obedience and service to God. This affirmation raises a fundamental identity question for the church: On what basis does the church see itself as an authority to affect this development? T.A. Kantonen asks that question quite forcefully when he writes,

By what right do we ask people to invest their lives and energy and property, their very selves, in the church? Do we offer surmises and theories as to why this is a sound investment? Do we appeal to their generosity and their self-interest? Or can "Thus saith the Lord" be attached to what we are saying and doing? If God has not spoken, we are merely manipulating human motives toward human goals. If God has spoken, our chief concern is not how to perfect our techniques and whip up our enthusiasms but how to be obedient to what [God] has to say.<sup>11</sup>

If Belief in God is truly as good a product as the church must affirm, then the church itself must have a high positive value of Belief or else the church has no authority to attempt to influence the character development of individuals. Such a value must be based on a solid

---

<sup>10</sup>Martin E. Carlson, Why People Give (New York: Council Press of the National Council of Churches, 1968), 154.

<sup>11</sup>Kantonen, 12.

affirmation that Belief in God is something to be treasured and respected. It is an affirmation that God's will will be revealed to those who believe, and that there is value in living one's life open to the guidance of a God who is active in human affairs. To share this affirmation of value both inside and outside the church, the church must be able to communicate the benefits of appropriating the Product to the customer. Only through such communication will the church be able to provide the motivation necessary to enable the customer (church member or potential member) to take ownership of the Product (Belief) and reap the benefits of such an action (the reward of eternal life, cessation of anxiety, affirmation of hope, etc.).

Regardless of the ability of the church to communicate its message with integrity, the church still faces a major dilemma: How does the church articulate the gospel message that eternal life is a benefit one can hope to receive by appropriating the church's Product if eternal life itself is no longer perceived as a desirable or valuable benefit to modern individuals? With the skeptical attitude prevailing among many today with regards to the desirability and possibility of the continuation of life after death, the power seems to have been taken out of the church's traditional message. Most modern liberals no longer fear eternity in Hell (as understood in the classical sense), nor do they picture Heaven as eternal bliss. The perception of

a lack of concrete benefits attributed to a life which transcends earthly existence is something which has little motivational power over the modern liberal mindset.

In response to this concern, the modern church has attempted to psychologize its message in order to regain the perception that Belief is the necessary and important response to God's grace which will allow life to be experienced in its fulness in this life. Yet, an attempt to psychologize, without a clearly understood focus on the sinfulness of humanity that transcends psychological explanations, reduces the church's message to simply a secular gospel--grounded in human desire, reason and emotion instead of in divine good news. By psychologyzing its message, the church loses the power of its conviction that salvation is ultimately to be found in God alone through Belief. According to Kantonen,

The gospel does not make its appeal to man's innate goodness, his sense of duty, the altruistic impulses in his nature. It is the good news that God himself has engaged in triumphant redeeming action to overcome man's sin and in his sovereign grace establishes fellowship with man on the basis of that forgiveness. . . . But this divine strategy achieves its end only when the objective redemptive act is personally appropriated in the commitment of faith. It is faith, the wholehearted grateful response to God's redeeming love, that is the true beginning of Christian stewardship. Stewardship is faith in action.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Kantonen, 90.



To enable this appropriation of faith, the church must position the value of its Product between the extremes of coaxing and whipping--between a product that needs to be sold at a discount because nobody wants it (a cheap, non-valued product--certainly a theologically unsound understanding of Belief), and a product that must be forced on its target audience for their own good because it does not appeal to them (an equally unsound understanding of Belief). The church must find a way to persuasively enable persons to place a high value on Belief and to respond in a manner such Belief deserves.

The church can address the coax aspect of the valuing process by understanding its message in this manner: that the grace of God is freely given to all, but that the benefits of such grace are not realized until Belief is appropriated (taken ownership) by the individual--a response that demands action. Such an understanding is merely an articulation of what the church truly believes is the relationship between grace and human freedom; it is not an artificial construct designed to stimulate a desire which is not already present in some capacity in the individual. The desire to believe is an active desire which demands an active response.

The church's task is to persuasively raise the consciousness of the human need for God which is already present in the person who is then directed to the way that

need can be responded to. Such a response can best be identified and strengthened through ones commitment to God with those areas of life which are currently most valued by the individual. It is the selection of the primary value over the competing values that enables one to more deeply become grounded in Belief. One way this selection is most powerfully experienced is through the allocation of a person's material goods. The writer of the Gospel of Matthew credits Jesus with expressing the concept this way: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). Kantonen explains this aspect of the selection response in terms of financial stewardship:

Money represents a person's own time, effort, brains, competence. It has been aptly described as personality in portable form. . . . If God has no partnership in a man's earnings, if he is not permitted to determine the use of a man's pocketbook, he has no real hold on the man himself.<sup>13</sup>

Through the commitment of placing ones financial resources in support of ones primary value, the individual is better able to appropriate the benefits of the Product itself. The church's task in this process is to provide the parameters in which the decision can be focused on and grounded in how one is able to respond to God's grace. If Jesus' words are correct, the strengthening of the Product occurs when one places ones resources in service to the

---

<sup>13</sup> Kantonen, 104.

Product itself. The church has the responsibility to articulate in a persuasive manner that the individual who hopes to find the ultimate meaning he or she seeks can do so only through a definite response on his or her part--through an affirmation of conviction in the living God which manifests itself in trust of ones life, as well as of ones material resources, to the leadings of God so that the appropriation of God's freely-given gift of grace may be experienced in its fulness. This is well within the traditional theology of John Wesley--the freedom of humanity to accept or reject grace. Yet, when understood in marketing terms, the church can see a way to capitalize on this understanding to be more effective and faithful to its own theology as well as to its ministry. The way is to highlight the response-element of Belief in the appropriation of grace process. Only as the individual knows (and believes) that something is required of him or her will the individual manifest that knowledge in action.

Belief is the response to grace. The church's Product is the human response to God's grace. While Belief is not in the exclusive possession of the church, the church is the institution entrusted with keeping the Product in front of the public. The value of such knowledge and self-perception on the part of the church provides the church with a Product that can be understood and perceived as valuable by the potential consumer. The value is manifested in the

understanding that through the church--the body of Christ--persons grow in their appropriation of the grace of God through a process of strengthening Belief, which results in fuller living and eternal life in the present. If the church's Product is understood in this way and is able to be persuasively communicated, the church has a buyable product which has value. It is a Product whose benefit should ultimately be nothing less than contagious joy and commitment to God in the life of the one who has appropriated it. In their study, Jackson and Jackson express it this way:

Commitment seems to stand as a middle term between trust and belief. If trust is a relational word depicting a buttoning down into the providers of life, and if belief is a propositional word articulating meaning, commitment takes part of its strength from trust as it lives toward and with the trusted objects, and it informs belief as it is out ahead of belief at the frontiers of spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the value that is placed on a product comes from the popularity of the product among one's peers. If the product is popular and beneficial, people normally will share the joy they have received by owning the product. The church is no exception as seen in the rapid growth of congregations who seem to have what has been called the spark of the Spirit ignited in them. The more there are joy-filled possessors of Belief who share their product with

---

<sup>14</sup> Jackson and Jackson, 28.

others, the more highly valued the Product itself becomes as the demand for the Product increases. It must be expressed, however, that the term joy as used here is not to be understood as an overly demonstrative expression of piety that oftentimes is repulsive to those upon whom it is inflicted; rather, such joy is a wholeness of spirit and demeanor--a quality of contagious power which instills a sense of envy and desire in those who would like to possess it.

It is at this point that a second element in the pricing scheme is introduced to maintain the integrity of the product's value and its desirability--the necessity to limit access to the product. According to the rule of capitalism, the capitalist has the right not to sell his product to everyone. As Heilbroner explains,

Thus the domination of the merchant, for instance, resides in his legal right not to sell to those who will not meet his price--a right that can involve great social deprivation, as in the case of famine, but that is nonetheless entirely free of direct personal coercion: the merchant cannot require a potential buyer to become an actual one.<sup>15</sup>

The church must come to conclude that if its Product is to be valued, it must be a product that is not only able to transform life and provide benefit, but is also a product that is not excessively easy to appropriate and hold onto. The church must aver that one's Belief in God will decrease

---

<sup>15</sup>Heilbroner, 40.

in intensity if such belief is not nourished on a regular basis. Nourishment is necessary to maintain the value of the product. It is therefore apparent that a way to increase the value of the church's Product is to minimize the ease at which that Product can be lost and devalued. Such a way of minimizing can be thought of, in Wesleyan terms, as helping one eliminate the desire to be a backslider. If the enticement to abandon the product is stronger than the benefits perceived to be provided by the product, the product loses its value. To address this issue, the church may want to consider imposing limits on how its Product will be made available to those both inside and outside the church, and to determine what conditions will help insure that its Product will receive the value it deserves from those for whom it is made available.

According to Heilbroner,

The critical aspect of money or capital goods as private property does not lie in the right of owners to use them in any way they wish, for such a dangerous social right has never existed, but to withhold them from use if their owners see fit.<sup>16</sup>

The church needs to establish boundaries of value in which its Product will be able to maintain its value as well as to provide the benefits it must provide if the Product itself has integrity.

---

<sup>16</sup>Heilbroner, 38.

### Boundaries of Value

Value is established between the limits of where perceived benefit ends and perceived non-benefit begins for the cost involved in the exchange. In marketing terms, the concept of opportunity cost, or what it is that is sacrificed in order to receive something else that is desired, best reflects this understanding. A good example of this type of thinking can be most clearly seen in the membership requirements in many of the non-mainline Protestant churches. Two questions will enable us to explore the concept with greater understanding. First: Does a person more highly value an organization or institution that has membership requirements for admittance than one that has no such requirements? Second: Are there requirements for entry into those institutions that persons currently value most highly?

Several examples will illustrate the concept. A certain grade-point average is necessary for admittance to most of the more prestigious universities in the nation. Without meeting the qualifications for admittance or continuation, one will not be allowed to study in those institutions. A civic club like Rotary has certain initiation rules and continuing requirements for membership. These include certain minimum levels of service and involvement in club activities. If one is unwilling to participate in the manner which was agreed to and which is

necessary for a well-functioning club, in many cases that person is asked to either prioritize their commitment to the club or else explore other opportunities elsewhere. A business has certain criteria established for the continuation of employment of its workers. If a worker fails to come to work or is habitually tardy or is unable to meet the demands of the job, the worker's actions are held accountable and various measures are taken to correct the situation.

Despite its awareness of these requirements, which have been established in order to maintain well-functioning educational institutions, service clubs and businesses, and which help establish the value of such entities, the church has oftentimes overlooked its responsibility for defining and implementing its own membership requirements. In an attempt to embody the freely-given grace of God, the institutional church has made membership in the church so easy that such membership has no perceptible value. In his book The Integrity of Church Membership, Russell Bow writes,

What is the result of this easy membership? For one thing, fewer people respect the church. Almost every other institution has standards or requires disciplines. The church requires less of its members than is expected by a good luncheon club. When a patient goes to the hospital, he gets into bed and submits to some rather unpleasant hospital routine. But one can join the church by simply having his name on the roll, and can remain a member for years without attending,



paying, or submitting to any disciplines except those of his own choosing.<sup>17</sup>

Another example may prove beneficial. Suppose an individual were suffering from a psychological problem and went to a psychologist for help. During the initial interview it was diagnosed that the person would need weekly counseling for a minimum of one hour for thirteen weeks. Would the psychologist tell the patient to simply come around when it was convenient, or would the psychologist arrange a definite appointment to which the client pledged to be present at the psychologist's office? Would such an appointment be presented in such a way that the client understood that in order to receive the help needed, a definite commitment of time and energy on the part of the client was necessary? If the client failed to show up at the appointed time, would the psychologist hold the client accountable? Would not the psychologist, with all integrity, call the client and mandate that either the client takes seriously the commitment to be helped or simply stop coming to the psychologist who cannot really help the client on such a sporadic basis? Would such an action reflect the integrity of the psychologist to the client as well as to potential future clients? There is a necessity to establish boundaries of value with regards to a product.

---

<sup>17</sup>Russell Bow, The Integrity of Church Membership (Waco: Word Books, 1968), 34.

In the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, potential new members are asked to "be loyal to The United Methodist Church and uphold it by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service."<sup>18</sup> Yet, is it recorded anywhere that a person was actually removed from church membership because he or she did not pray for the church? It is interesting to reflect on whether there has ever been a time when a person was removed from membership who seldom came to church or rarely served or prayed but still upheld the church with their gifts alone.

The church must ask itself what is the value it has placed on its own Product which is then communicated to the public. This question must be answered carefully if the church is to maintain a competitive posture in society. Is the church's present message one which communicates that salvation can be purchased? Is its message that one can simply attend a Sunday morning service and make a small donation and not be expected to serve? Or does the church's message communicate that one may only be expected to serve but not to give any financial support to the church? The requirements of stewardship must seriously incorporate all the requirements for church membership in an attitude of accountability if the church is to be perceived as valuable to modern society. According to Kantonen,

---

<sup>18</sup> United Methodist Church, The Book of Discipline, 1988 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 125.

Christian truth has its vitality only as the functioning of the living body of Christ, and Christian living depends on the resources of the Christian fellowship. It is obvious, therefore, that our main task is not the teaching of Christian ideas or the promotion of Christian ideals. It is uniting men and women with the Christian church, extending and strengthening Christ-centered fellowship. Stewardship is consecration to this task.<sup>19</sup>

The church must enable the value it places on its Product to be used to help put a value on specific derivations of that Product. Such derivations of Belief are the means through which the church attempts to enable the appropriation and strengthening of faith. Along with these derivations of Belief are the values which must be placed on such things as class attendance, participation in service projects, giving of financial resources, etc. To value the derivations of its Product, the church must hold persons accountable in each of these areas, not only in the financial arena. A proposed model incorporating accountability in all areas of ones faith journey could be expressed in the form of a covenant letter addressed to potential new candidates for church membership:

In order to join St. John's UMC, we require that all members (subject to physical limitations) attend worship opportunities on a regular basis, attend and participate in at least one ongoing Bible study or fellowship group on a regular basis, serve in a major mission capacity at least once each calendar year and give as they are financially able. The church, in turn, will provide all members with many opportunities for service, study and support which will help them

---

<sup>19</sup>Kantonen, 19.

grow in their faith in an atmosphere of mutual accountability--for we believe that the only way to really grow as a community of faith is in strengthening our relationships with God and each other; we take membership in our church that seriously. If you are unable to prayerfully attempt to meet these covenant requirements, we recommend you consider a different church home which may better suit your needs.

The concept is clear--whereas grace is free, membership in St. John's UMC is costly, but the value of the Product (an increasing Belief in God) is worth the price to those who are serious about joining this denominational expression of the Christian faith. United Methodist laity are awakening to this understanding. James Holsinger and Evelyn Laycock write, "if United Methodist laity are to be the disciples God has called them to be, they must be willing to hold themselves accountable for their action or inaction."<sup>20</sup>

A criticism may be leveled at this point against the requirement impositions for church membership previously cited. Such a criticism can best be expressed: "But that makes St. John's un-Christian. It is not open to all persons unconditionally; there are conditions for membership. You are putting a price tag on grace!"

The answer to this concern is found in the original premise from which St. John's operates: Grace is free, but the human institution designed to provide the means to nourish and strengthen the appropriation of that grace

---

<sup>20</sup>Holsinger and Laycock, 126.

through faith (Belief) is not free--it costs to keep the institution going, not just financially, but also in terms of individual time and energy. One cannot hope to grow in Belief without investing oneself in the process. If the church cannot affirm the conviction of this statement and implement measures to show how seriously it takes that conviction, the church will continue to be frustrated by a society which questions why the church even bothers to exist if it does not take seriously its own Product. Marketing consultant George Barna summarizes this understanding as he writes that "the type of investment required by the Church is one of commitment--a total personal, emotional, and intellectual commitment to the product."<sup>21</sup> Anything less than commitment is lessening the value placed on the Product itself.

Another criticism may be leveled at this point: "By making membership in St. John's so strict, no one will want to join the church and it won't be able to pay its bills or apportionments."

This criticism raises a valid concern, but is one that also must be answered by the basic premise that Belief is the answer to God's grace; that faith is the human response to God; that the church is the institution designed to promote, nourish and expand Belief, and that the church

---

<sup>21</sup> Barna, 54.

itself must live by that belief. The church can only do its job well if it believes in the value of Belief itself. This means that the church must be willing to take the risk of losing what it presently has in order to gain what it is called to serve--those persons who need help with their faith journeys or who do not yet know where the answer to their search for ultimacy is leading--to the living God who is experienced most fully when one believes. Anything less than valuing Belief enough to risk living by Belief itself as a witness to that Belief relegates the church to the realm where secular criteria determine what the ultimate message of the church is. Without Belief, the church is perceived as solely involved in political advocacy, social action or psychological motivation--areas where many secular institutions and pop-philosophies are more competitive than the mainline church--areas where human desires take precedence over the desires of a God affirmed, responded to, and supported by Belief.

As the church views itself as engaged in a competitive arena, it must be emphasized again that the church does not have a God-given right to survive as a human institution in a capitalistic society; it cannot demand allegiance by the public; it must earn that allegiance which is a continual process. The business world has long understood the value of this need for repeat business, as management consultants Tom Peters and Nancy Austin explain,

The sale merely consummates the courtship, then the marriage begins. How good the marriage is depends on how well the relationship is managed by the seller. . . . The natural tendency of relationships, whether in marriage or in business, is entropy--the erosion or deterioration of sensitivity and attentiveness. . . . A healthy relationship requires a conscious and constant fight against the forces of entropy.<sup>22</sup>

It is only as the church is faithful to its mission, only as the church is able to communicate that ongoing active Belief in God is what God desires for God's creation, is the church able to be granted its right to continue as a religious institution which has a valid claim on the lives of persons in today's society.

A final criticism may be leveled at attempting to establish and maintain the perceived value of the church's Product through the implementation of accountability requirements: "If the church is so strict in its policies, how does the church open itself up to hearing the voices of transformation that are addressing the problems within the church itself?"

This question is perhaps the most difficult to address; however, the answer may be found in the meaning of Belief and in its expressions of love and hope. As the contagious joy which has been lacking in many of the mainline churches is ignited; as persons become supportive of their Belief and engage in submitting themselves to the ongoing journey to

---

<sup>22</sup>Peters and Austin, 70.

strengthen that Belief, and as they are held accountable to that journey by those who make up the church, the process of human transformation begins. Persons are once again placed on the road to perfection, a journey which, as Belief develops, must necessarily result in a deep concern for addressing social justice issues, a true concern for missions, a deep love of people which arises out of a sense of ownership of the Product and not out of a sense of guilt or duty or shame.

The objective of pricing the Product at its legitimate value is to enable the Product to be joy-filled, to be sharable, and to protect the owner from treating the Product with an attitude of "once saved always saved." Only a strong value of the Product will allow such joyous freedom to be experienced among church members and potential members. Only such a strong value will motivate persons to give of themselves in a spirit of joy which will ultimately have an effect outside the walls of the church building itself and result in the most effective means of evangelism available--personal enthusiasm which comes out of ones own Belief. Church consultant Kennon Callahan expresses the outcome of such a condition as it affects stewardship:

People give to people in whom they sense mutual trust, respect, and integrity. People's assessment of how worthwhile the cause is to which they are being asked to contribute has a direct relationship to the sense of trust, respect, and



integrity they have for the persons asking them to give.<sup>23</sup>

What is the effect of such commitment and trust as a person appropriates the church's Product joyfully?

According to church fund-raiser Martin E. Carlson,

It is probably more than a matter of historical coincidence that the great revival periods in American History were followed by an upsurge of benevolence resulting in the establishment of colleges, missions, and other broad humanitarian concerns. . . . All of these things would appear to reflect the fact that where there is apprehension of religious truth, there is a corresponding response; where there is faith, there is resulting action and one of the forms this activity takes is giving.<sup>24</sup>

With the value of the Product defined and the benefits of such value explored, the next step in the marketing process is to enable the Product and its value to reach persons who are capable of appropriating the Product. This is the task of promotion and is the topic of the following chapter.

---

<sup>23</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, Twelve Keys to an Effective Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 113.

<sup>24</sup> Carlson, 51.

## CHAPTER 5

### Promotion

#### Introduction

The thesis of this project is that through a careful analysis and application of marketing theory, the United Methodist church can regain priority in the lives of its members and rekindle the enthusiasm among its membership necessary for the church to minister effectively in the current age. To begin the process of implementing a marketing understanding of the institutional church which will accomplish this thesis objective, the need for such a process has been explored, the Product of the church has been identified and the value of that Product has been defined. The next step in the application of the marketing process is to discover ways of helping the church maintain the integrity of its Product's value over time and in the various ways that Product is made manifest in the life of the church.

It must be remembered that value is formulated in the heart and mind of the consumer. It is the perception of benefit to the consumer that is to be derived from a product which establishes the reality of the value of the product and, hence, the integrity of its value. Tom Peters and

Nancy Austin in A Passion For Excellence write, "the customer's perception is what's viewed as most important, rather than a so-called hard-nosed view of reality."<sup>1</sup> Perception is the impetus for establishing the value of the Product in the mind of the consumer. They continue,

The real problem is that *perception is all there is*. There is no reality as such. There is only perceived reality, the way each of us chooses to perceive a communication, the value of a service, the value of a particular product feature, the quality of a product. The real *is* what we perceive.<sup>2</sup>

While Peters and Austin rightly acknowledge that perception is what defines reality for the individual, such a statement is not entirely accurate when one considers the possibility that perception may not be based entirely on an arbitrary set of external characteristics attributed to a product, nor entirely on the sensory inputs or hopeful desires of the individual. Perception depends on a combination of factors, the essence of which must be rooted in some degree of fact or common reality which must transcend the limitation of individual mental constructs or else meaning itself could not be shared adequately. Such a reality can be glimpsed (perceived) only as an image of a common truth. In Barthian terms, while ultimate Truth rests outside of human perception, it is not beyond the capability

---

<sup>1</sup>Peters and Austin, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Peters and Austin, 71.

of humans to get glimpses of what this Truth is like as long as one recognizes that perceived reality is not ultimate reality.<sup>3</sup> What Peters and Austin call attention to is the individual's perceived reality, which is the only reality the marketer (and the church) can work with. Such an understanding supports the conclusion that the church cannot offer persons a relationship with God as ultimate reality; rather, the church can only offer persons the ability to perceive, appropriate and affirm the conviction that God is a living God who can be trusted. The church's influence on perceived reality is the grounding of the individual in Belief itself--the essence of the church's Product.

It is the purpose of this chapter to provide an inside look at the importance of this perception-making mechanism through which the church is able to communicate its Product and value to its membership's perceived reality on a consistent basis. This mechanism is identified and understood in the language of marketing as promotion.

#### The Perception Element

As the church is operative in a society that is dominated by a common ideology, the church is under the same constraints as a business which must compete for the positioning and acceptance of its products by consumers. Like a business, the church can either maintain a positive

---

<sup>3</sup>Barth, 80.

perception in the mind of the customer or else be ignored and shunned--its product rejected.

To address this condition the church has attempted to innovatively promote its purpose for existence in a variety of ways in the recent past. Numerous books have been published in an attempt to educate persons on the ministries provided by the church. Television programs have been created like Catch the Spirit to show the church in action. Yet, despite these good intentions at public relations, there has either been an apparent lack of sincerity perceived by the public in the message the church desires to communicate or else the church has attempted to address needs which are of little interest to its target audience. This is reflected in the remarks of cynicism and criticism leveled against the church itself in recent days. In marketing terms, if perception is all there is, then a critical examination of why the church is engaged in the process of innovation and promotion is warranted.

The church has been forced by modern society into self-reflection; it has no alternative other than to ask itself whether the church is innovating for the sake of meeting the needs of the customer, or whether the church is innovating for less altruistic reasons. Does the church promote what it does in order to help others or does the public perceive a different focus as more primary in the church's actions?

In his book Homiletic David Buttrick tackles these questions by writing:

We do not preach so that the church may succeed, or that competing denominations may exceed others by topping last year's quotas. . . . The reason why much officially promoted evangelism aborts is that the world views it as thinly disguised institutional self-interest, which, of course, it usually is.<sup>4</sup>

Perception transcends the specifics of the product itself and reaches behind the essence of the message to the motivation for its expression. If the church attempts to alter its perception in the minds of individuals without first understanding why it seeks to do so, a definite miscommunication will ultimately result which can lead to a substantial loss of integrity attributed to the Product itself. The church has been given a high responsibility to deal faithfully and honestly in its attempts to innovate particular derivations of the Product so as to connect with modern culture.

A primary focus of the modern church has been to identify ways its mission can regain a sense of priority in the lives of the people. The introduction of liturgical renewal and the creation of a new hymnal have been specific developments faithfully designed to meet the need for keeping the product relevant to the customer. The process

---

<sup>4</sup>David Buttrick, Homiletic: Moves and Structures (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 229.

through which these innovations were created testifies to this integrity.

Additional projects such as Covenant Discipleship groups and the Disciple Bible study have also been created in an attempt to maintain the church's positive perception in the minds and lives of its members. Yet, innovation must take place at all levels in the life of the church, from addressing the relevance of its theology to the structure of its fellowship groups and outreach programs. Innovation is the process through which the church continues to create and support the perception that its Product is valuable and necessary to meet human need at its deepest level.

Innovation can be considered the process through which the church struggles to bring its Product into a positive relationship with the world. This understanding of innovation provides permission for the church to adapt and create as many new forms of expressing that Product as necessary to meet the changing demands of society. What worked yesterday to stimulate Belief may not work today. The hymns that provided immense inspiration at the turn of the century may not connect with a generation of young people raised on the rock bands Poison and Guns & Roses. The church is destined to constantly innovate or perish.

To aid the church in the process of innovation, an understanding of how the church's Product is made available to individuals is necessary, for it is through deriving

particular product expressions from the greater Product that the church is able to nourish persons in their growth in Belief. Belief itself provides the framework through which the church develops its product derivations (ministries).

As Belief is the human response to God's grace, then those ministries that help an individual strengthen that response must be considered derivations of Belief itself. The process then becomes clear: the church develops ministries (products) that are designed to enable one to strengthen his or her grounding in Belief (the greater Product). The church then promotes those ministries which are designed to be appropriated by the individual as a means to support his or her response to God's grace. Such a strengthening can only result in greater faith, less anxiety, a stronger commitment to others, and a more inclusive expression of love--all of which can be attributed to being fruits of the Product.

With this understanding of the innovation and promotion processes, various ministries can be developed by adhering to a common perception: Belief is strengthened when one actively participates in the act of believing itself. This is a critical component of the promotional process. Just as love is only able to be understood and appropriated as one actively participates in the act of loving (in the act of giving love away), Belief in God can only be strengthened as one is involved in ways of actively participating in the



process of believing itself. This process is manifested most powerfully in relationship--in the sharing of Belief with others (the essence of evangelism), which is both an outgrowth of and which results in the development of the contagious joy discussed in Chapter 2.

The church, as the institution that is responsible for helping society maintain its Belief, is also under the obligation of enabling the appropriation of Belief to occur. How it accomplishes this necessitates several understandings on the part of the church:

1. The church must itself believe that Belief is the answer as the Christian response to God's grace.

2. The church must place a high value on that Belief. This includes the acceptance of a high level of accountability among its members to reflect the mandate that Belief is nurtured by the congregation through study, service, prayer, action, etc.

3. The church must package the specific ways it can encourage appropriation of Belief so as to make its Product understandable, accessible, enticeable, communicable and possessible. This is the essence of promotion.

The church has the responsibility and mandate to develop and promote various ministries which support, challenge and nurture persons on their journey to appropriate Belief.

### Developing the Promotional Paradigm

In order for the church to develop marketable derivations of Belief that are designed to nurture and nourish persons in the church, the church must approach its task with a solid grounding in how and why persons come to own their own Belief. A conviction by the church to expedite and nurture the belief-process is the initial step toward the church accepting a strong responsibility for furthering such a process.

The church has rightly struggled with the question of how persons go about appropriating Belief (although not as it has been articulated in marketing terms) and has developed structures to expedite the process of enabling persons to believe. Yet, action undertaken without understanding the why behind the action oftentimes results, in the marketing arena, in the development of inferior products to the detriment of the Product itself. Sometimes a blinding flash of the obvious is necessary to help the church understand why the church does what it does.

Traditionally, the church has held that persons grow in Belief:

1. Through revelation--A first-hand experience of the love of God somehow made real and understandable to the individual through the Holy Spirit.

2. Through struggle--Facing of life's crises when hope and trust and faith are tested and owned.

3. Through study--Consciously investing in appropriating the wisdom of other persons and their stories and struggles with faith.

4. Through worship--Experiencing the sense of the transcendent God; standing in awe of the Divine mystery in an attitude of thanksgiving and praise; hearing the Word proclaimed and interpreted, and partaking of the sacraments.

5. Through interaction--Joining in fellowship with persons; sharing spiritual journeys with each other; working with others to help those in need.

The goal of each of these opportunities is to stimulate the appropriation of Belief and to enable such Belief to be owned by the individual as well as by the church. It is such Belief which provides the motivation for ministry. This perception is rightly held by the church as it understands that the promotional paradigm flows out of Belief itself. It is the purpose of promotion to enable the appropriation of Belief as an ongoing growth process in the life of the congregation. The key to this promotional process is found in the essence of positioning.

According to Al Ries and Jack Trout, "positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect."<sup>5</sup> There are many promotional

---

<sup>5</sup>Ries and Trout, Positioning, 2.

responses which can help support the positive positioning of the product in the mind of the prospect. Several of these will be addressed here as they apply to the church.

### Worship

Webster's defines worship as "to honor or reverence as a divine being or supernatural power."<sup>4</sup> Worship is an active participation in the focusing of attention on something greater--a process designed to draw one nearer to the object of devotion. For the church, worship is the way persons bring their attention toward God (their object of trust) as a means of strengthening their affirmation of and relationship with God (that object of trust). The goal of worship, from the human level, is to strengthen that affirmation of trust, to strengthen that belief in the object of trust, to strengthen that belief in God. Worship, then, is not that which draws one away from, decreases the strength of or results in a devaluation of Belief; rather, worship as worship builds up the body, strengthens the appropriation of Belief, and increases the value of Belief itself in the process. With this definition, worship is worship only if it is Belief-supportive. Anything which detracts from such a focus on supporting Belief cannot be considered worship in this sense.

---

<sup>4</sup>"Worship," Webster's.

The implications of such a definition provide boundaries within which the church can understand its promotional responsibilities. Worship is not entertainment, although certainly joy-filled worship is entertaining. Worship is primarily to be seen as a means of strengthening Belief. According to Douglas Johnson,

The general feeling before and during worship in a vital congregation is one of expectancy. People come to worship seeking assistance in their lives. They do not come to be observers, nor do they expect a performance by the choir or by the worship leader.<sup>7</sup>

Holsinger and Laycock support this observation:

When a family moves to a new town and begins to look for a church, their first encounter with a church will, in the great majority of cases, be the Sunday morning worship service. If they like what they see and hear, if something seems to be happening there, they may return next week to visit the church school or other smaller group.<sup>8</sup>

Worship is designed to meet some deep spiritual yearning in the human soul--the desire to believe. The church has proclaimed through the centuries that only through such strengthening of Belief is one truly set free to live. Worship that is designed to stimulate the appropriation of Belief is true worship, the process through which life is empowered to be lived in its fullest.

---

<sup>7</sup>Douglas W. Johnson, Vitality Means Church Growth (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 55.

<sup>8</sup>Holsinger and Laycock, 112.

Despite the importance attached to worship by current church-growth literature, worship in the United Methodist Church has not been able to meet the demands of its task for many of those persons whom it sees itself responsible. Worship is considered boring when seen through the eyes of children, youth and young adults. This is reflected in the absence of these age groups from the institutional church. Worship is seen primarily as adult in focus. The regular church service does not seem to be able to connect with the world in which these younger persons live. Dennis Benson expresses a harsh criticism to this worship malady:

If the gospel is presented in a boring manner not in keeping with its natural vitality and power, it doesn't deserve to be communicated. It is an insult to Christ to use old wineskins for the new wine.<sup>9</sup>

Lyle Schaller confirms the importance for a worship environment that is zestful as he writes "the most influential single approach to increasing church attendance is to raise the level of expectations. . . . The Christian faith is a high demand religion."<sup>10</sup> A worship experience that is anticipated to be enthusiastic, meaningful and joyful, is a worship experience persons of all ages can look forward to participating in.

---

<sup>9</sup>Dennis C. Benson, The Visible Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 40.

<sup>10</sup>Schaller, 44 Ways, 104.

Despite this understanding of the benefits to be derived from enthusiastic worship, what is the typical message of the church that seems to be communicated to the young? Does the church of today communicate, either in spoken or unspoken words, that worship in the sanctuary is designed primarily for those persons who are not young; that God is not as interested in children worshiping as God is of adults; that the active needs of youth to move and express themselves physically are subordinate to the needs of older adults for order and passivity in worship? What is the typical message of the church? This question must be addressed in order that worship may become more Belief-supportive for all ages and audiences.

At this point, a re-articulation of the situation the church finds itself in, in marketing terms, may prove helpful. Under the interpretative umbrella of a marketing understanding, the church is in the process of struggling with how worship is able to connect with all age levels so that all may be empowered through worship to grow in the appropriation of Belief. This articulation can be rephrased in question form in terms of the marketing paradigm: How might worship be more Belief-expressive? It is through understanding that worship, in its essence, is designed to enable persons to believe and to celebrate that belief, that the church can communicate a unique and ultimate message which the secular world cannot articulate.

The church's purpose in worship, from a marketing perspective, is not to provide a psychological quick-fix to the problems persons face due to the ideology of capitalism; it is not a time for massive pastoral counseling; it is not a time for political rhetoric, nor a time intentionally designed to increase church membership. A marketing understanding of worship is, in essence: the advocating, promoting, and communicating of Belief so that persons may grow in that Belief and, through that growth, take ownership for their own responses to the living God.

#### Education

How does the church's understanding of its Product affect education? The same reasoning expressed in worship can be applied here. The church is obliged to ask itself whether it is responsible for educating persons in their faith. If the church answers in the affirmative, the church must possess a conviction in Belief itself and communicate that conviction at all levels of church life. This does not mean that the church must have all the answers, but it must believe that as one strengthens Belief, one is better able to understand Who it is who has the answers that are being sought.

Educational ministries that are developed to stimulate this process and enable the appropriation of Belief can be promoted effectively if they are packaged creatively. For over two hundred years, the way the church has packaged its



educational ministries has primarily centered around the Sunday School program and perhaps a Wednesday night event. In the present competitive environment, a new look at the traditional educational ministries of the church from a marketing perspective will provide ways of understanding how the church can attract more persons to the physical church building itself for educational opportunities.

The primary step in the process of attracting more persons to church is for the church to resource the potential customers and identify their needs and desires. This calls for identifying specific target groups--persons who share common characteristics such as age or marital status--and surveying their needs and desires. Product development designed to meet those needs and desires which are uncovered is the following step. For example, if the target group is identified as the popular Baby-Boomer group, surveys may show that family relationships and a sense of meaning in life are priorities on their list of needs and desires. Ministries designed to address those concerns can then be developed. Yet, the process does not end there. It is in the promotion of the ministries that have been developed specifically to address the needs and desires which have been identified that is found the key to programming success.

In order for the ever-busy Baby-Boomers to consider attending a church-sponsored educational event, several

factors must be considered--all of which are promotional considerations:

1. Will the educational offering seriously address the needs of the target group?

2. Is the educational offering developed in an interesting, thought-provoking, life-connecting style?

3. Is the time and day when the event is offered convenient or scheduled with sensitivity to the needs of the target group?

4. Is there a sense of conviction that this specific educational offering is necessary to help the target group address their concerns?

5. Is information about the event communicated to the target group effectively? (Does the target physically receive the message?--i.e., read the newsletter, hear the announcement, etc.).

6. Does the event deliver good on its promises? The key to the effective promotion of educational events is a long track-record of successful previous events.

A similar set of questions can be used to address any educational offering of the church. The effectiveness of the promotional process depends on a serious effort to enable the target group to accept ownership of the product as easily as possible.

### Evangelism and Mission

Belief is strengthened (appropriated more fully) where it is most fully exercised--in the process of giving itself away. Nowhere else is the promotional process felt as keenly as in evangelism and mission outreach. By developing opportunities for mission and evangelism that enable one to actively participate with ones whole self in the process of affirming Belief, the church is better able to attract and motivate persons to serve in ways the world needs. Such opportunities are most easily responded to in the affirmative if they are communicated clearly, positively, and dynamically with conviction, and if such opportunities have been designed to meet the needs of the target persons whom it is desired will participate in such opportunities. If there is a perception by those who are asked to be in mission that their needs will be met by participating in mission, there is a greater likelihood that such persons will actively participate in mission out of sense of satisfying both their needs as well as others' needs. Such a participation manifests itself in an attitude of engaging in mission for mutual benefit instead of simply out of a sense of obligation and duty.

### Nurturing Ministries

Educational theory in recent years has generally focused on the necessity for developing both the context as well as the content of group meetings. The understanding of

fellowship groups as places where persons can strengthen their appropriation of Belief through relationship enables the groups to be less introspective and more outer-oriented by keeping their focus from turning solely to group relationships for support or therapy. If the purpose of small groups is to nurture Belief, there is a transcendent dimension inherently brought into the consciousness of the groups themselves. Perhaps the model that best conveys this understanding are the groups associated with Alcoholics Anonymous.

In an Alcoholics Anonymous group, a conscious articulation that it is a higher power and not the group or counselors who provides the healing enables the understanding that relationships are supported by and are supportive of Belief. In this model, when human relationships sour, Belief itself is not sacrificed--it can maintain itself in both the vertical (between God and individual) as well as in the horizontal (God experienced in the interaction between individuals) dimensions. Without maintaining the vertical relationship with God, one can only possess Belief when supported by others--a possession that can ultimately be lost in isolation, rejection or solitary confinement. Belief must be able to be communicated by the church both through human interaction as well as through Divine interaction. If human interaction is the only way, then Belief becomes a human possession--something to be

owned like a jewel for its surface value instead of treasured for its deeper value--a stronger relationship with the living God.

By viewing the church's task of communicating its Product and the value of that Product as a promotional activity, the church now is able to develop the specific ministries that can reach persons on the level they must be reached in order to be motivated to respond positively to what the church has to offer.

#### Promotion Specifics

The promotional paradigm allows for the creation of very specific expressions of ministry in the categories previously identified. Such expressions, if created with quality and care, can aid the church in accomplishing its objective of helping persons come to own their own Belief and to manifest that belief in service to others. One way of viewing the promotional process as helpful in providing the church with the means through which its products can be made available to persons is in terms of packaging. The church can package the various specific derivations of its Product for optimum response.

It has been a commonplace practice in many churches to offer segmented programs such as Sunday schools, fellowship groups, Bible studies, mission projects, etc., at different times and with little formally articulated connection with each other. From a communications standpoint, this has

confused the church's ability to understand itself. The children's Sunday school does not know how it relates to the adult fellowship group which does not know how it impacts the mission project of the church. A centralizing mission statement is needed to enable those persons who make up the church to understand how the church works and what the connection is between those elements that compose the church.

A centralizing statement will enable the church to articulate the relationship between the Trustees and youth ministry, between the children's choir and the adult worship service, between the education commission and the missions committee. Without an overarching mission statement, segmentation in the church will continue to be rampant which results in a decrease in motivation as persons cannot see how their participation in the life of the congregation is related to the other parts of life in the church. Dennis Benson writes,

The fragmentation of secular culture has infected the life of many congregations. Local church programming seems to segment people's lives so that they are offered only pieces of the Christian life. An educational experience takes place on Wednesday evening, a worship opportunity on Sunday morning, a social option on Saturday, or a service experience on a Saturday.<sup>11</sup>

Without a common unity, there is no understanding how the choir director affects the church's outreach ministry or

---

<sup>11</sup> Benson, 143.

how the youth counselor affects the retired members of the congregation. Belief itself cannot be nourished or communicated effectively when there is no perceived connection between the various derivations of Belief that the church offers its congregation. The more segmented and isolated the various expressions of Belief become, the less the church is able to understand what enables and constitutes its product of Belief in God.

At this point it must be asked whether this is a model of the Christian church which the institutional church's members are seeing and sensing. Is the message of the church an incongruous message? In the advertising world, a company which is perceived to be as confused about what it offers as, oftentimes, the church is perceived to be, would not be able to communicate what it was really trying to promote. Without a clear articulation of what constitutes the whole product and the benefits to be derived from the product, the company has little it can effectively communicate to the potential consumers.

Does the church also experience a problem in articulating what composes its Product? Is the Product of the church the specifics the church offers--the groups, the study, the music, the people? Or is the Product of the church something deeper, something infinitely greater? How the church communicates and promotes itself has a

substantial impact on how persons perceive the church and its Product.

To put the promotional paradigm to work in creating and offering specific products in the church, an illustration may prove helpful. Many churches in the United Methodist denomination are suffering from a lack of volunteerism as well as many of the following problems:

1. The majority of their members do not come to worship on Sunday morning on a regular basis.
2. The majority of their members do not give on average more than four percent of their incomes to the church.
3. The majority of their members do not participate in ongoing spiritual growth opportunities provided by the church (Bible studies, Sunday schools, fellowship groups, etc.).
4. The majority of their members do not participate in mission or outreach ministries. Only a select few feel motivated to reach outside the church's walls as a church into the life of the community.
5. The majority of their members refuse to serve when asked by the church to teach Sunday school or to serve on a commission or committee--other priorities take precedent.
6. The majority of their members do not pray for the church on a regular basis.



This is the condition that is afflicting many United Methodist congregations as reflected in the vast number of church-renewal publications of the recent decade. The promotional paradigm offers a solution to this condition.

First, taking the promotional paradigm seriously forces church leadership to identify and redefine their understanding of the church's mission. The paradigm carries with it the need for church leadership to affirm for themselves that even in the midst of such a gloomy outlook, Belief is still possible and is the primary purpose of the church.

Second, the promotional paradigm forces church leadership to review their specific church's ministries to see how such ministries are or are not connected. A close analysis of how the church communicates to its members how Bible study affects worship and how fellowship groups affect service is made possible by the promotional paradigm.

Third, the promotional paradigm forces church leadership to develop products that are specifically designed to nourish the appropriation of Belief. Such products may be Bible studies that do not teach only about the Bible, but how the Bible connects with living in Belief in ones daily life--even life in the corporate boardroom. Other products which could be developed include fellowship groups that do not only provide time for studying, but also time for sharing together.

Products can be developed that provide music ministries which not only encourage the study of music for performance, but also encourage the study of scripture and composers in an attempt to learn the meaning and purpose behind the words of the songs. Products can be developed such as commission meetings that focus not only on business matters, but also on theological understandings of how administration is capable of enabling persons to more effectively appropriate Belief and thereby fulfill the mission of the church.

Products can be developed such as mission outreach programs that focus not only on Third World economic problems, but also on the church's own backyard and how persons can strengthen and maintain Belief under less-than-optimal circumstances. Products can be created such as evangelism emphases which are not designed to simply increase church membership or numbers, but which flow out of the church's understanding that all persons can enjoy life more fully through Belief experienced in interaction with others.

Products can be developed such as youth groups that focus not solely on fun and games, nor solely on study and prayer, but on connecting Belief with all aspect of a youth's life. Products can be created which nurture growth in Belief for youth in the school and home, products which connect with the reality in which youth live.

Fourth, the church must promote the variety of its products as a packaged, unified whole to its entire membership. A new education series should not be created only for adults or children, but tied together with all the various offerings of the church. A simple advertising statement that communicates this unity may be something like,

First UMC is the church where you can not only learn about Belief in God, but experience Belief itself this Sunday evening with our churchwide program: There is hope even in the face of crises. There's a program for everyone as together we explore the ways we have assurance that there is something greater at work in the midst of the crises we face in today's complex world!

Such a packaging of an educational event has been implemented at Claremont UMC in Claremont, California with their Wednesday Night-L.I.F.E. series. The format involves a variety of activities for all ages including childcare, children programs, youth meetings, and adult studies--all packaged under a promotional umbrella as a unified offering to the congregation. The intent of such packaging is clear: to communicate the relevance of the church's Product to the entire congregation. Such communication is done through Sunday announcements, notices in the church newsletter, telephoning, personal invitation, etc. However, this is not done simply for communication purposes alone, an ulterior motive is present in the church's message itself--the motive of communicating with intent to persuade.

The leadership of Claremont UMC are experiencing that they ultimately package and promote the ministries of the church to persuade persons to prioritize their need to grow in their appropriation of Belief. This is the church's goal, especially as the church enters the Lenten season. In order for this message to be heard and appropriated by a congregation which is located in a society which is bombarded by hundreds of advertising promises and dozens of conflicting priorities, the church must deliver good on its promise that Belief will meet the human needs the church lifts up and addresses. In other words, the church must be more than image, it must embody the truth of its message. The Wednesday L.I.F.E. series is one way of doing this. And the concept is applicable for most any church subject to one major criterion: as long as the primary intent of such activity is sincere in its effort to stimulate and nurture Belief. Peter Peacock explains,

Temporary changes in image may be accomplished by changing communications tactics, however, to the extent that that such modifications are only cosmetic and don't reflect substantive changes in underlying factors, they may produce disastrous results with the church being perceived even more negatively after the image change is attempted.<sup>12</sup>

Such a position is also supported by Callahan,

People are reasonably astute at discerning an "advertising campaign" that does not have substance or strength derived from the fundamental life and mission of a church. Some churches have tried to convince the public that they are solidly

---

<sup>12</sup>Peacock, 88.

engaged in mission when, in fact, all they are engaged in is trying to convince the public they are.<sup>13</sup>

A common element is found in these positions: an orientation which supports the stance of presenting a product with integrity, an orientation which forms the theological and ethical foundation for persuasion.

#### Persuasion in Promotion

The promotional process can be defined as bringing knowledge of the product into the awareness of the consumer in order for the product to be responded to through appropriation. In simple terms, the objective of promotion is to enable the product to be owned. Such a goal is the outcome of a process of communication, but it is more than simply informative communication, it is communication with a purpose--the purpose of motivating someone to respond to the product in a desired manner. It is a process of persuasion. George Barna writes,

Regardless of the approach, communication exists to inform or persuade an audience. In the marketing process, then, communication is important to reap the benefits of both informing and persuading. Informing people about conditions and alternatives is a central element in stimulating a response. Communication is also the means to influence people's behavior relative to the product, price, and distribution network. Without communication, marketing would be a strictly intellectual activity, lacking any

---

<sup>13</sup>Callahan, 81.

semblance of practical utility and void of any widespread participation and involvement.<sup>14</sup>

The church is engaged in the business of persuasion. If this is not the case, if the church is not designed to persuade individuals that the spirit of Christ is alive in the world today so as to stimulate a response of acceptance of the truth of that claim, what is the church's purpose in a competitive society? Without a persuasive purpose, the church is simply competing on an informational level with the various institutions that are much more adept at persuasively communicating their agendas in a capitalistic culture than is the church.

The church has historically seen as its primary role to be a disseminator of information. It has viewed itself as the proclaimer of the message and not as the motivation behind the information. The church has not adequately realized that information itself is not a primary motivator. Motivation, as understood by the marketing paradigm, is the result of a discrepancy between what is and what one would like to be in the future. According to consumer behaviorist Del Hawkins, et al.,

The motivation to resolve a particular problem depends upon two factors; the magnitude of the discrepancy between the desired and existing states and the importance of the problem.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Barna, 135.

<sup>15</sup>Hawkins, et al., 388.

Hawkins goes on to explain that "consumer problems may be either manifest or latent. A manifest problem is one of which the consumer is aware. A latent problem is one of which the consumer is not aware."<sup>16</sup> It is the theological responsibility of the church to address both levels of problems using persuasive means in an attempt to help the individual alleviate the problem.

Is the institutional church hesitant at seeing itself as a persuasive instrument for the gospel? Perhaps an answer might be found by viewing the church's aversion to the traditional marketing terms of selling and persuasion as they might be used in helping define the church's purpose. Such words conjure up images of coercion and manipulation, but are words, nonetheless, which most clearly articulate what the church is presently engaged in. Sales consultant Tom Hopkins addresses this concern as he writes,

How do we get [the customer] to believe what we know is true? We can tell him. We can ram the facts down his throat whether he wants to listen or not. We can let him know how stupid we think he is because he won't admit the truth of our statements. We can do all that and he's still not convinced. Why? Because we've told him. The professional salesperson operates on a different concept, one that's simple and effective. Here it is:

"If they say it, it's true."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Hawkins, 398.

<sup>17</sup>Tom Hopkins, How to Master the Art of Selling, 2nd ed. Ed. Warren Jamison (1980; reprint, New York: Warner Books, 1982), 35.

Hopkins' main premise is that it is the individual who must take ownership for the appropriation of the message. It is the individual who must decide whether to trust the message and appropriate the product. It is the individual who must say it is true. Only this orientation respects the freedom of the individual to accept or reject the product on its own merits. Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoes this understanding as he writes,

To try and force the Word on the world by hook or by crook is to make the living Word of God into a mere idea, and the world would be perfectly justified in refusing to listen to an idea for which it had no use.<sup>10</sup>

Although Bonhoeffer's idea that the Word will do its own persuading all by itself is to be respected in theory, it must be rejected in practice. When a world is unable to receive the Word or refuses to hear the Word even as it is spoken because the means of communication through which the Word is spoken are outdated and do not allow the Word a fair hearing, can the Word sell itself? While the church cannot force someone to hear the Word, must not the church use the means at its disposal to get the Word a fair hearing in the midst of all the competing advertising messages persons are subjected to on a daily basis? If the gospel message is worth hearing, why is the church stuck primarily with archaic means of expressing that message? Should not the

---

<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer, 207-8.



church, with integrity, use whatever communication means as are at its disposal to spread the message of the gospel? Is not the church in the persuasion business? The church must decide if its message is worth entering the competitive arena on a consciously pre-planned basis, or whether it will continue competing without a consciously planned effort. Either way, the church cannot escape competition.

A simple look at a typical Sunday morning will provide support for the effective use of persuasive communication on the part of the church. Since education is usually considered a primary ministry of the church, the question can be raised: What motivated the church members to become Sunday school teachers? Did not somebody recruit (persuade) church members to serve in that capacity? How about the acolytes? Did they volunteer or were they recruited in a persuasive manner? Were these persons persuaded by logic alone or were other persuasive techniques used like appealing to a sense of duty or fear or guilt or shame or obedience to persuasively communicate the desperate need for someone to fill the position? According to Hopkins, "Seldom do people buy logically."<sup>19</sup> It is the emotional appeal that motivates persons to respond, not the logical. The more emotionally connecting the message, the greater the likelihood for response. In Hopkins' words, "The more

---

<sup>19</sup>Hopkins, 44.

senses you involve, the better your odds of making the sale."<sup>20</sup>

There is a limit, however, to the conscious use of persuasive techniques by the church. It is a limit that the church must be respectful of--the limit grounded in an understanding of human freedom. According to ethicist Gaylord Noyce,

Thoughtful pastoral action . . . affirms both the free autonomy of the person and the need for conversion toward obedience in Christ. . . . It means that we do not manipulate people into believing, although we continue with the invitation into servanthood.<sup>21</sup>

While Noyce's warning is to be acknowledged, it nevertheless does not deny the need for persuasion as the means through which the church reaches out and proclaims its message. The concern that a persuasive approach infringes on the human freedom to accept or reject the message is a rejection of an inherent part of the communication process itself. If one cannot communicate the church's message in a persuasive manner, why should anyone listen to it, much less believe it? Yet, there is a limit where persuasion is no longer persuasive, but coercive. Noyce continues,

Public relations and marketing materials reek of manipulative approaches to other persons. In them the subtle line between persuasion and psychological coercion is crossed repeatedly. No

---

<sup>20</sup>Hopkins, 62.

<sup>21</sup>Gaylord Noyce, Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 173.

one who attempts to reach out to the public can avoid meeting that boundary, of course.<sup>22</sup>

The very act of communication is motivational if it is done with a persuasive intent of desiring another to accept the message which one communicates. This understanding applies to both the process of communication and to the content of that communication. For the church, if the gospel message is not convincing nor is able to be communicated persuasively, what does the message of the church become? If the essence of Belief itself is a non-persuasive entity, if there is no reason why one should believe or why one should act on that belief, how does the church hope to persuade a person to volunteer his or her hard-earned money and limited time to causes that cannot be effectively communicated in a persuasive enough manner to warrant a desirable response?

Advertisers have long understood that few products sell themselves. All products need the help of selling and advertising in one form or another, even when such help is not entirely desired. According to Peters and Austin,

Many are as contemptuous of most advertising as they are of salesmen. Many consider it to be "mere fluff"! Most of our technical (and banking, etc.) friends hate it. . . . They look at it not with thinly disguised contempt but with wholesale contempt. And yet, is there a product whose benefit is known before it has been broadly and

---

<sup>22</sup>Noyce, 178.

effectively communicated (i.e. effectively advertised)? Clearly not.<sup>23</sup>

The church's Product is no exception to the rules of marketing. If Belief could adequately sell itself without the help of the church, why does the church waste its time and energy attempting to proclaim its message? The church must learn how to apply the best persuasive techniques of advertising and sales in order to support the integrity of its Product and to enable that Product to be appropriated by persons--which is the ultimate mission of the church.

#### How to Promote Effectively

In order to enter the realm of promoting its product effectively, the church must ask itself: What is the benefit of the church's Product? What benefit does Belief itself provide people? Only by understanding itself in terms of the benefits its Product offers persons will the church be able to persuasively communicate its message to modern society.

There are two ways of promoting a product. The first is by communicating the features of the product--the specific attributes of the product which may or may not be obvious to the potential consumer. The second is by communicating the benefits to be received from the product by the customer. A close analysis of each of these ways of

---

<sup>23</sup>Peters and Austin, 92-3.

communication will provide better insight into the promotional process.

Webster's defines the word feature as "a prominent part or characteristic."<sup>24</sup> A feature is that which makes up a specific attribute inherent in the product itself. This definition must concern the church because the attributes of the church's Product are not fully known. How does one know everything there is to know about Belief? For this reason, the church can only promote the features of its Product on the level of the derivations of the Product itself. The church can promote the features of facilities, the qualities of its Bible studies or worship services, the power of the sermons, the perfection of the music, the number of people involved in mission, the programs the church offers, the amount of money it gives to benevolences or apportionments. All these areas are on the level of feature--it is an information-only level designed to provide awareness and knowledge of what the church has to offer.

The counterpart to the feature approach to promotion is the benefit approach. Webster's defines the term benefit as "to be useful or profitable to."<sup>25</sup> The question here asked is not "What is offered?" but rather, "What is expected to be received, gained or changed because of what is offered?"

---

<sup>24</sup> "Feature," Webster's.

<sup>25</sup> "Benefit," Webster's.

The benefit approach focuses on what one expects to receive from Belief, on the needs which are claimed to be satisfied by the Product in the lives of individuals. It is only at this point that motivation to accept the Product is kindled.

Persons respond to the benefits which they hope to receive from a product; they do not respond primarily to a product's features themselves. The response is not only attributed to the benefits persons perceive for themselves, but also to the benefits they perceive the product offers to others whom they care about. In short, for the church's purposes, what the individual perceives to be the benefit which is derived from Belief is what motivates the individual in stewardship, mission, service, etc. It is the perceived results of what the Product itself can provide that provides the impetus to action. For the church, the benefit approach is the most powerful and effective way of rekindling enthusiasm in all areas of the church's life.

Once the church has identified the benefits which an individual can expect to receive from Belief (which is a task for theological reflection), those benefits must be communicated to people. The process of conscious communication of benefits formulates the definition of the term advertising. Advertising is the way in which the benefits that a product is expected to provide the consumer are communicated. In business, this dimension of the promotion process is called selling the idea. An analysis

of the elements that constitute the selling process of advertising may prove helpful.

The advertising/selling process begins with a clear understanding of the benefits of the product. This is most effectively done by bringing the benefits anticipated to be provided by the product in touch with the target customer's present reality. Preaching commentator Ronald J. Allen explains,

Professional advertising intentionally uses language and imagery to associate a product with a world view. The consumer is not motivated to buy the product on the merits of the product per se. Rather, the advertisement associates use of the product with the world view it has created. Television advertising is so sophisticated that it can create a world view in thirty seconds.<sup>24</sup>

The church's Product also carries with it an inherent world-view that is communicated each time the church shares its message--the world view that it is God and not humanity who is ultimate reality and who has the answers persons seek. How the church's Product and world view connect with the world view of the potential customer is how the Product's benefits will be understood by the recipient. Once the benefits have been defined and clarified by the church from the anticipated perception of the customer (the customer's world-view), the process turns to discovering ways of maximizing the communication of those benefits

---

<sup>24</sup>Ronald J. Allen, "The Social Function of Language in Preaching," Preaching As a Social Act: Theology and Practice, ed. Arthur Van Seters (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 171.

through various alternative modes of communication: face-to-face, telephone, print, radio or television, etc.

Once the medium has been identified, a message then must be developed that uses the medium as effectively as possible. Nevertheless, the medium is not ultimately responsible for the appropriation of the church's Product. As Dennis Benson explains,

Television, radio, and newspapers alone do not bring people to the community of faith. Advertising can only tease, beckon, or give a taste of what needs to be fully experienced within the body of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of the limitations of the various media, the medium selected does provide a powerful vehicle for portraying the product as either necessary or superfluous. The degree to which the idea is communicated that one must appropriate a specific product or else miss out on a life-changing opportunity is shaped by the world view accepted and communicated by the advertising medium itself. A recent article by John Kavanaugh in Media and Values explains,

The ultimate moral imperative is the consumer as a matter of identity. Our very meaning is wrapped up in the economics of production and consumption of more products. Products are portrayed as the condition of happiness. . . . The media and the economic system coalesce into a book of religious revelation. . . . Buying is theologized. . . . We have not only a philosophy of human identity and human relationship collapsed into the world of buying and selling, we have a full blown

---

<sup>27</sup> Benson, 55.



theological system. The result is cultural ideology as idolatry.<sup>28</sup>

To compete on the promotional level, the church must consider the strength of the competition. The competition is a theological system which has resources behind it and a message that reaches persons at their emotional level--the level which stimulates response. To compete with such a system, the church must also discover a way to connect with persons on an emotional as well as on an intellectual level.

The church's model for such a task is found in Jesus Christ. As Benson explains,

We may look with justifiable criticism at the rock station that panders to the lowest common denominator of taste in its target audience. It uses consultants, contests, the phone, and interviews at concerts to explore what the listeners want. Yet, these pop communicators are strangely closer to the communication style of Jesus than are most churches. . . . It is remarkable to see how many communication modes and media he used. He preached, rebuked, told stories, used objects, debated, or simply touched others. Jesus was not cataloging communication techniques or using gimmicks. He drew upon appropriate media forms because he knew what the receivers needed in order to experience the love of God in their particular mode.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus' modes of communication were geared to the needs of the context in which he found himself. An understanding of the contextuality of communication can also be useful to

---

<sup>28</sup> John Kavanaugh, "Ideas of the Marketplace," Media and Values (Los Angeles) [Media Action Research], no. 37 (Fall 1986): 3-5.

<sup>29</sup> Benson, 38.

the modern church. For example, in face-to-face communication, the church's message can already be rehearsed and clarified so that in the interaction itself the content of the message can be sent and received effectively with the opportunity for feedback to make sure it was received and understood as intended. The desire is for the message to be communicated with sufficient emotional impact so as to be motivational and persuasive. This is the communication context normally experienced in Sunday worship, in commission meetings and in small groups.

The church can also use the telephone for its message. Since there are no visual cues to aid in the interaction of a verbal exchange, the vocal inflection and enthusiasm of the person who presents the church's message must communicate the necessary emotional thrust designed to send the message persuasively. The receiver is then asked questions to clarify the communication exchange.

If the church chooses to communicate its message by using the print medium, a similar method is followed. However, because of the visual dimension of print, the layout of the article or message greatly affects its receptability. Many churches have experienced a significant loss of readership of their church newsletter because of a poor layout which does not help the reader pick up on the main idea of a given section of the newsletter. A careful study of the inverted pyramid style of writing that

newspapers and magazines use would prove quite helpful for the church's communication efforts. By placing the most important information first with less important, supplementary information following, and by highlighting the opening sentences to catch the visual attention of the potential reader, readership of church newsletters can greatly increase. Direct mailers have mastered the art of using visual devices and teases to get their material read; the church can do and must do the same thing if it wants its membership to be effectively informed through the use of the print medium.

Radio and television are two other alternatives for the church to consider; however, advertising on these vehicles takes financial resources which are usually beyond the ability of most congregations except those located in small-sized markets where advertising rates are most affordable. In larger markets, while public-access cable stations allow for some exposure, the limited potential viewership of such channels seldom justifies the time and energy involved in the programming endeavor. Nevertheless, if financial resources allow, the use of radio and television is a very effective way of keeping church membership informed, especially if the church ministers to a wide area (regional churches).

Despite the effectiveness of these forms of communication, the church still seems to have problems with

what these advertising vehicles are understood to represent: the epitome of a capitalistic system which espouses a world view that is oftentimes considered unChristian. Thomas Troeger comments on an observation made by William Fore, the Assistant Secretary for Communication in the National Council of Churches of Christ:

There are several other dominant myths in television programming that are of direct relevance for religious broadcasters. These myths are:

- \* The fittest survive.
- \* Happiness consists of limitless material acquisition.
- \* Consumption is inherently good.
- \* Property, wealth, and power are more important than people.
- \* Progress is an inherent good.

Fore asserts that "the whole weight of Christian history, thought and teaching stands diametrically opposed to the media world and its values."<sup>30</sup>

If Christian teaching is diametrically opposed to the media world, then the Christian church should not use the electronic media. If this is the case, then the gospel message is not able to be communicated through modern-day communication vehicles and the church's message is unable to compete with those very myths of which Fore is so critical. Unless the church enters the advertising sphere, it is doomed to continue losing in the battle for acceptance of

---

<sup>30</sup> Thomas H. Troeger, "The Social Power of Myth as a Key to Preaching on Social Issues," Preaching as a Social Act, ed. Van Seters, 207.

its Product amidst the variety of competing belief systems expressed in powerful ways to most individuals on a regular basis.

#### Understanding the Real Competition

Sunday morning worship is usually the one single time when the church has physical access to a large number of its membership. It is during this time that the benefits of the Product must be persuasively communicated. Yet, today, many churches experience less than a fifty-percent attendance of membership on a given Sunday--something else is competing with the church for the time of its members. What is the competition the church faces? A list may prove helpful:

Saturday night "date-nights," business demands, leisure activities, sleep, travel, sports, television, televangelists, traffic, other churches, shopping mall sales, the beach, homework, family problems, crises, capitalist ideology, secular attitudes, etc.

The church today is thrown into the competitive arena and must either promote itself or go under. Yet, when faced with such stiff competition, there is a strong temptation to resort to somewhat questionable and possibly unethical measures in order to win the battle for priority. The church is no less pressured than business in this matter as the church competes with the business world for the time and talents of the same people. Such ethical considerations and their theological foundations must be addressed as one considers applying a marketing paradigm for use by the

church. These considerations are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Ethics

#### Introduction

In the previous chapters we have seen why the marketing paradigm is necessary to help the church compete in today's society. We have explored the Product of the church, the value of the Product, and the various ways the church is able to use derivations of the Product to stimulate appropriation of the Product itself. Throughout this process, many questions have been raised regarding the validity of understanding the church and its mission in marketing terms. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the theological and ethical implications of the marketing paradigm as applied to the church. A comparison of the traditional understanding of Protestant theology with the concepts set forth in the previous chapters will be undertaken to show that the marketing paradigm, when responsibly applied to the church, can operate within the belief structure of Protestant theology and is able to be ethically implemented as a tool in support of the mission of the mainline Protestant church (including the United Methodist Church).

### Theological Summary

Historically, the Protestant church has held that four fundamental beliefs are primary in its understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. These beliefs are:

1. In Jesus Christ, God revealed Godself to humanity.
2. Salvation is obtained by grace through faith.
3. Salvation is a personal transformation which manifests itself in loving action for the social good: justice, righteousness, compassion, etc., designed to help establish the historical actualization of the Kingdom of God.
4. Evangelism is the method through which the church shares its faith and enables the transformation (conversion) process to take place as persons move from unbelief to belief.

Does the marketing paradigm, as it is applied to the church, fall within these historical parameters of Protestant theology? A close analysis of our application of the marketing paradigm to the church will help provide the answer.

Through the use of the marketing paradigm the church's primary offering to persons has been identified and understood as an affirmation of conviction in the activities of the living God--a God who has been revealed most completely in Jesus Christ. This primary offering--Belief itself, the church's ultimate Product--is essentially the first major belief of Protestant theology.

Through the use of the marketing paradigm, the church's interpretation of Belief has been understood as made



possible by grace which is appropriated through faith. Such an appropriation is understood as resulting in a transformation of the individual's relationship to God (justification) and a new orientation to the world. Affirming the reality of this transformation is the "good news" message of the church. Such an understanding is the essence of the second major belief of Protestant theology.

Through the use of the marketing paradigm, the value of the church's understanding of Belief has been interpreted to mean that Belief must somehow manifest itself in action if a transformation has indeed occurred. The individual must indeed act differently, live differently, and must continue to grow in his or her faith--the process of sanctification. Such a manifestation of Belief is not simply the result of a new understanding of obedience or duty; rather, it is an expression of enthusiastic joy--a wholistic approach to love in action. The church, as an institution, is entrusted with proclaiming Belief, embodying Belief and aiding in the process which enables Belief to be manifested in the action of love. This understanding is equated with the third major belief of Protestant theology.

Through the use of the marketing paradigm, the way the church's Product is made available to persons is in the creation of and promotion of a variety of ministries. This promotional function of the marketing paradigm greatly enables the church's ultimate Product to be made available

to persons who need, desire and/or can benefit from a stronger relationship with God--a relationship which is understood as able to be encouraged through the proclaiming of the "good news"--the sharing of Belief. Such a promotional function is the essence of evangelism and can be ultimately equated with the fourth major belief of Protestant theology.

In summary, our interpretation of the marketing paradigm is not simply an arbitrary application of a secular mindset on the institutional church, it also provides an affirmation of Protestant theology. The marketing paradigm enables Protestant theology to be redefined in modern terms which can connect with the secular mind and shed new understandings on how the church can proceed in its mission to the modern age. Theologically, the marketing paradigm is able to fit within the church's self-understanding and can contribute in a positive manner to that understanding. What now must be explored are the implications of utilizing the marketing paradigm for the purposes of helping the Christian church approach its modern-day challenges.

#### An Ethical Orientation

The methodology that will be followed for the remainder of this chapter focuses on a series of questions, designed for each of the major concepts expressed in the previous chapters, which attempt to help the reader understand the ethical implications of the marketing paradigm as it applies

to the church. To begin this process, a look at how the marketing paradigm is understood and implemented in the human mind is necessary.

The marketing paradigm is at a major disadvantage when it is to be critiqued from an ethical standpoint by those in the church. There is a rightly justified skepticism on behalf of many in the church as to whether the marketing paradigm can be considered ethical by any standard, so ingrained is it in the capitalist ideology mindset. Yet, such an orientation fails to allow the marketing paradigm to receive a fair hearing by those for whom it is destined to serve. In order for one to gain an objective understanding of the ethical implications of the marketing paradigm, one must understand how an ethical perception itself is developed and appropriated by persons in regards to that which is novel to their experience.

In his book The Nine American Lifestyles, Arnold Mitchell provides an observation that is quite helpful in forming an initial understanding of the perception-making process. He writes,

More than anything else, we are what we believe, what we dream, what we value. For the most part we try to mold our lives to make our beliefs and dreams come true. And in our attempts to reach our goals, we test ourselves again and again in diverse ways, and in doing so we grow. With this growth comes change, so that new goals emerge, and

in support of these new goals come new beliefs, new dreams, and new constellations of values.<sup>1</sup>

Mitchell recognizes the power of dreams and goals in shaping ones perception of life, yet one must notice that he does not seem to take into account the fact that dreams and values and goals are usually considered expressions of human thought which are made possible when ones mental energies are not focused primarily upon ones physical survival. It is difficult to believe that a starving person, a person suffering from chronic pain, or a person held in bondage by oppressive structures and attitudes is able to mold his or her life around a dream or a goal to the same extent as a person who does not suffer from a lack of the basic necessities in life. This oversight is what makes Mitchell's observation so powerful and useful to the church. It is an oversight which is directly attributable to a person who lives in a society which operates by an ideology that has enabled the highest standard of living for most of its persons in the industrialized world. Mitchell has essentially expressed that, in the United States, survival is not the primary concern for most people. With their basic human needs met, most Americans are freer to dream and to believe in something more. This knowledge is crucial in

---

<sup>1</sup>Arnold Mitchell, The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We're Going (1983; reprint, New York: Warner Books, 1984), 3.

understanding how beliefs and values are gained and clarified in an affluent society like the United States.

As Mitchell has stated, individuals can be substantially influenced by what they believe or value. The degree of control which those beliefs or values have over the individual depends, to a great extent, on what the individual perceives to be the benefits which can be derived from affirming such beliefs or values. Such an understanding of the power of perception carries with it an underlying assumption: that all persons (even the reader of this project), in order to change a belief or value, must be persuasively convinced that there is a benefit to be derived from such a change; that this change can help him or her satisfy some need or curiosity, satisfy some desire or concern in order for that change to be undertaken and the dominating belief or value to be replaced by a new one.

The fact that an individual can be stimulated to respond in some manner through a change in perception forms the basis for understanding the motivations which lie behind specific behavior. In marketing terms, "consumer *motivations* are the energizing force that activates behavior and provides purpose and direction to that behavior."<sup>2</sup> Marketers have long known that it is possible to alter behavior by influencing the factors which form motivations.

---

<sup>2</sup>Hawkins, 304.

The process is four-fold in marketing theory:

1. Change the belief(s) about the attributes of the brand [product].
2. Change the relative importance of those beliefs.
3. Add new beliefs.
4. Change the beliefs about the attributes of the ideal brand [product].<sup>3</sup>

The perceptual growth process carries with it the key for enabling new beliefs and values to be understood with a fair appraisal. By helping one perceive the benefits which may be received if one is open to a possible change in beliefs or values, the relative merits of new ideas or concepts are then able to be judged not solely on the basis of sacredly held values and beliefs, but rather from the dialogue of those beliefs and values with the outcome of the growth process itself. It is the acceptance of considering the possibility that change itself may be beneficial that enables an openness to the appropriation of the ethical implications of such novelty. Without such an openness, novelty must be presented in a defensive posture which supports a critical skepticism of its value until it has proven itself--a proof which may never materialize as the possibility for valuing such novelty is likely to be defeated by the skepticism itself holding fast to traditional understandings. As Dennis Benson points out,

---

<sup>3</sup>Hawkins, 343.

"Contemporary analysis of values is very dangerous when our standards for good and bad are based on a nostalgic view of the past."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, blindly throwing out traditional Christian values simply to embrace contemporary values is not the answer. One is challenged simply to be open to the possibility that novelty may hold some degree of truth which traditional orientations may have overlooked, and therefore, that novelty has some degree of value.

This possibility of valuing novelty in the present must be incorporated into the process by which one undertakes the task of judging the ethical merits of such novelty. It is the purpose of the following discussion to provide the reasoning through which one can be open to the novelty of appropriating an ethical understanding of the marketing paradigm as it applies to enabling the church to address its present needs for renewal and growth.

#### An Ethical Process

In Chapter 2 the marketing paradigm was presented as a means for addressing the decrease in church membership and overall malaise among the membership of the United Methodist Church. It was identified that the capitalist ideology has educated American society in a world view that has as its basic premise the concept of competition. This competitive reality is dominant in the American culture and must be

---

<sup>4</sup>Benson, 32.

dealt with from within the system itself as such an ideology is powerful enough to establish its own parameters within which it operates. Ideas that are not competitive to this ideology, ideas which do not challenge capitalism by focusing on the weaknesses found within the strengths of the ideology itself, simply do not pose much of a threat. Only an ideology or theology that can prove itself as a competitive foe of capitalism by engaging capitalism on its own terms, will be considered a worthy adversary--so engrained is capitalism in the American psyche.

Since capitalism dominates American social self-definition and, therefore, shapes the primary ethical orientation of American society, the most effective way to overcome the shortcomings of capitalism is by working with the ideology itself through using the positive aspects of the capitalist system to the church's advantage. By truly respecting the power of capitalism the church takes seriously the primary social faith found in the United States and, therefore, the church is not perceived as operating outside the realm of modern day reality for most persons. As H. Richard Niebuhr points out,

When men's ultimate orientation is in their society, when it is their value-center and cause, then the social mores can make anything right and anything wrong; then indeed conscience is the internalized voice of society or of its representatives. The sociological interpreters of ethics are as persuasive as the sociological interpreters of religion, because for so many human beings, or for all of us at so many times, the implicit or explicit faith that underlies our



ethos and ethics is the social faith whose god (value-center and cause) is society itself.<sup>5</sup>

By taking seriously the power of the social faith, the church can engage the foundations of this faith and set about transforming those foundations with the help of the marketing paradigm. Such a transformation has been defined as a two-fold process: individual life transformation and social transformation. As Niebuhr has pointed out, there is a common binding between these two dimensions of transformation: one dimension cannot be transformed without directly affecting the other; the individual cannot be affected without a similar effect on society. The question which must now be posed is: Does the marketing paradigm help Christianity address each of these transformative dimensions in an ethical manner?

To effectively transform American individuals and society, the church must recognize the power of the competitive mindset which dominates a capitalistic society. Competition is the way of life in the United States. The decision-making process which stimulates and supports human and social transformation is itself essentially a process which enables one to choose from various competing alternatives which are perceived to help solve a problem or to provide a desired benefit. Without addressing the competitive structure of this process, ideas are not able to

---

<sup>5</sup>Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, 26-7.

be communicated, accepted or critiqued effectively. The marketing paradigm is the way communication itself takes place in the midst of this reality. What the paradigm is at its root level is essentially a relabeling of what has been traditionally understood as the process of communication. The paradigm requires a concept (product or idea) which has a value (is worthy of attention) that can in some way provide a perceived benefit to another (a benefit which may be accepted or rejected given the variety of alternatives to choose from) when communicated to the other in a persuasive manner. For the institutional church, the marketing paradigm enables the church to enter the communication arena on a competitive level--on a level where the church can influence the decision-making process which provides the impetus for individual and social transformation.

The church finds itself in an ethical dilemma when considering the necessity of entering the realm of competitive communication. If the church does not enter on a competitive level, the church will not compete with the other alternatives available and will ultimately continue to lose its priority in the lives of its own members as well as in the lives of the vast numbers of unchurched it seeks to attract. The questions which must now be posed are: Is this ethical? Is this good? Is this right? A serious consideration of these ethical questions is necessary for the church to determine whether it is adequately doing all

that it can in meeting the needs of the society in which it has the responsibility to serve and to transform.

The church must acknowledge itself as a competitor for the minds and lives of persons in modern society. If competition for the lives of individuals is deemed beneath the dignity of the church and is credited as being unethical by the church, and if the church continues to lose members as well as remain irrelevant to most of American society by being unable to connect with persons on their level, is the church acting ethically under its present orientation? Is it right that the church fails to adequately reach the majority of society with a message that is believable as well as truthful? Is it right that the church should refrain from aggressively positioning itself as a priority in the lives of persons by refusing to use the means at its disposal? These are tough questions for the church to consider.

The marketing paradigm helps the church understand that it is not ethical, nor good, nor right, that the church defends its precarious position by hiding behind the statement that the church is remaining faithful to the gospel only if it does not succumb to the temptation to use the secular system in which it finds itself to the advantage of the gospel message. Although it may be difficult to affirm, the marketing paradigm clarifies what the church must understand to minister effectively to the modern

mindset: that the church cannot operate effectively and competitively in the social realm in which it finds itself unless it operates from a conscious marketing orientation.

If the church considers itself faithful all the way to its own demise because it refuses to use the means necessary to reclaim the priority of the gospel message for today, then what? Where is the working for good and a better life which the church sees as its mission? Where is the institution designed to be the beacon of faith if the church fails because it is unwilling to work within (but not be absorbed by) the ideology that threatens the church's very destruction? Is this ethical?

A series of questions may help the church gain a clearer perception of the critical areas it must consider in order to address the ethical dimensions of its relationship to modern society.

1. Is the gospel message a powerful enough message that it can compete for priority in society?

2. Is the gospel message to be communicated by the church to the culture from within or from outside the culture?

3. Is the gospel message best communicated by the church through means which arise from the current culture or through means which repeat traditional practice?

4. Is the gospel message itself the best way through which culture can enhance the good and minimize the bad of the modern age?

The marketing paradigm can enable the church to reposition itself in society as having something valuable to offer persons at their deepest levels of need; however, people have to know what it is that the church offers. It is only by enabling persons to understand the unique Product of the church that the church will be perceived as different than the other competitive offerings of society. The church is more than just another social welfare organization or civic club; the uniqueness of the Christian church is found in its affirmation of the ongoing activities of the living God--the spirit of Christ at work in the world. Without a clear, persuasive articulation of and belief in the priority of Christ, the church will be unable to claim legitimate priority in the lives of modern persons.

As we consider the benefits of the marketing paradigm for addressing the needs of the church, an ethical and theological question is raised regarding what the paradigm might do to the Christian understanding of the gospel message. At the beginning of this chapter we have seen that the marketing paradigm allows for a restatement of traditional Protestant theology in contemporary terms. The question which must now be addressed is: Is the gospel message altered, edited, changed or degraded by applying the

marketing paradigm to the church renewal process? To answer this question, a study of the ethical implications of the paradigm as applied to understanding the Product the church offers is necessary.

#### An Ethical Product

In Chapter 3 the marketing paradigm was used to provide a clearer understanding of what the institutional church has to offer in terms of product. It was identified that the church's unique Product is the offering of Belief (faith, hope and love) in the living God and the ways such Belief is made manifest and strengthened (love expressed in the development of ministries). Is this understanding of what the church has to offer--a redefinition in contemporary terms of the traditional concept of salvation by grace through faith--a viable, valuable and ethical way of perceiving the church and its mission?

The marketing paradigm helps the church focus on its message, its ministries, its image, its position. The paradigm enables the church to affirm its integrity, shatter its illusions and break through its malaise by enabling it to understand itself more clearly in contemporary terms. Such a model provides the church with the opportunity to build direction and vision in a competitive society. By using the marketing paradigm, the church can identify what it really has to offer and can learn the ways to gain access to the reality of those persons it seeks to attract. The

marketing paradigm, as applied to the church renewal process at this point, can be considered ethical as it allows the church to more strongly articulate the church's Product.

The church can have a greater impact on the lives of individuals as it comes to understand how it can offer its Product better by using the marketing paradigm; however, such a process is not ethical unless it is exercised within specified boundaries. Whenever one is entrusted with the life and care of another, certain boundaries are necessary in order to prevent abuse of the power given to the one in whom such trust is granted. According to ethicist Gaylord Noyce:

Working with a person's emotions and anxieties is often part of theologically sound evangelism. It can also be dishonest manipulation. In spite of assertions and assumptions in upbeat advertisements of the religious life, a person may be made *more* lonely by professing faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 10:35, "against . . . father, . . . mother"), *less* successful in business, considerably troubled by the cares and injustices of the world, even persecuted for righteousness' sake.<sup>4</sup>

As the church struggles with articulating and developing its affirmation of its Product with integrity, it must be careful not to abuse the benefits the marketing paradigm provides. By intentionally using the paradigm to oversell its Product, by overstating the value of the church's ministries, by promising what it cannot deliver, by

---

<sup>4</sup>Noyce, 176-77.

perceiving the Product solely as an outgrowth of the church's own efforts, the marketing paradigm can be used for unethical ends. According to Barna,

Many of our critics will fail to realize that the marketing process itself is neither holy nor unholy; it is how we use and perceive the process and the fruits of the process that determine whether or not we have abused it. If we put all our trust in our own marketing abilities or if our marketing efforts are successful in reaching people for the church, and we give all the credit to the marketing process rather than to God's blessing our efforts, only then are our critics correct.<sup>7</sup>

The marketing paradigm itself is as ethically neutral as any human creation is capable of being. At its basic level, marketing is simply another way of understanding human communication. Marketing is an extension of the communication system which has been developed to optimize the sharing of ideas between a sender and a receiver. The goal of marketing is to stimulate the possibility that an idea will be heard, appropriated and responded to, hopefully in a desirable manner, but with no guarantees as to the direction of the response due to the nature of human freedom. While the marketing paradigm is a creation of human intellect and is subject to the conditions of human sin, it can be utilized within the boundaries of goodness and rightness and it can help the church in its attempts to communicate its Product in the competitive culture it

---

<sup>7</sup>Barna, 152.



presently finds itself.

A question is raised at this point: What are the boundaries of goodness and rightness which provide the parameters in which the marketing paradigm can be utilized in an ethical manner in regards to the church's Product itself? Since the paradigm, as applied to the church, is simply another way of understanding and communicating the Protestant church's basic theological orientation (as seen at the beginning of this chapter), the boundaries in which the paradigm can operate could be defined as the same boundaries by which the church itself is able to determine whether or not it operates in an ethical manner. It is how the paradigm is used, not what the paradigm is, which determines the ethical or unethical outcome of the marketing process itself.

In American society, the marketing paradigm is constantly being used in some form regardless of whether it is consciously or unconsciously applied. The paradigm is simply a process which enables communication to take place in a competitive environment. Anywhere there is communication, there is the marketing paradigm; anywhere there is the marketing paradigm, there is communication. Such an understanding places the marketing paradigm squarely in the midst of any and all communication exchanges. Whenever one individual desires another individual to hear an idea, to receive an opinion, to respond to a stimulus, or

to appropriate a product, that event is essentially a marketing event.

The church itself cannot escape the fact that its communication efforts are essentially attempts to persuade persons that what it preaches and teaches is essentially worth receiving and appropriating. Since communication is essentially a marketing process in action, the determination of the ethical outcome of the process is whether the process is used in a manner which is bounded by certain accepted principles and beliefs, in this case, principles and beliefs grounded in the Christian understanding of God's relation to humanity. How God is understood to communicate with humanity and how humanity is understood to communicate among itself in accordance with God's intent form the parameters for the ethical evaluation of the communication process itself.

Traditional Protestant theology can provide greater clarity as to the essential parameters which may be used to determine the ethical boundaries of the marketing paradigm in a specific communication exchange. Such ethical concepts include: truth, rightness, justice, fairness, compassion, love, goodness, helpfulness, etc. That which is not conducive to the maximization of each of these criteria, given the situation in which they are to be applied, can ultimately be considered unethical. For example, if the message communicated by the paradigm is untrue

(intentionally or even unintentionally), the question is raised whether the paradigm is being used in an unethical manner. Yet, can the process of communication itself--the process of sharing ideas--be considered unethical? Without considering the vehicle through which the communication takes place, the context in which the communication takes place, or the content of the message itself, can the possibility which enables the process of communication itself--the ability to send and to receive ideas--be considered unethical? If such is possible, then the process of communication itself can be considered an unethical activity regardless of the situation in which it occurs. Such logic supports the conclusion that it is how the marketing paradigm is used, not the paradigm itself which determines the ethical outcome of the process. If the paradigm is used to communicate an intentionally false message (such as: Belief in God does not really matter), then it is the usage of the paradigm, not the paradigm itself, which is unethical.

Another way to clarify this thinking is perhaps to compose a list of guidelines which can be used to determine whether the marketing paradigm is operating inside or outside the ethical boundaries in a specific communication exchange. For example, a communication process can be said to operate outside its ethical boundaries if the means through which a message is communicated is destructive to

the content of the message (product); or if the means interfere with the sending or the receiving of the message as it was intended (promotion), given the limitations of the vehicle; or if the communication event itself is intentionally abused through the sharing of intentional misinformation, coercion, or falsehoods and, therefore, cannot be used for any mutually constructive purpose or outcome in the context in which the communication event takes place. If a communication event is abused in these ways, the communication event can be considered to fall outside the parameters of ethical communication.

The marketing process itself is not inherently conducive to either goodness or badness, justice or injustice, truth or untruth in its own right. The paradigm itself is ethically neutral; nevertheless, it is subject to possible abuse, even by the church, if it is used in an attempt to consciously achieve less just, less truthful, less loving outcomes than it is capable of encouraging. The marketing paradigm is a powerful tool and can be considered a tremendous ally to the church if the paradigm is used in an ethical manner as it encourages appropriation of the church's Product.

#### An Ethical Price

In Chapter 4 the marketing paradigm was applied to understanding the church's Product and the ministries that are derivative of that Product in terms of value. The

ethical question now raised is: Is it good, helpful and truthful to think about what the church has to offer persons as something with value? This qualitative question is posed by the marketing paradigm to help the church understand the benefits it claims for its Product so that they can be articulated in a convincing manner and perceived as consistent with the essence of the Product itself.

According to William Willimon,

The American church lives in an ethically debilitating climate. . . . Triumphalism--whether it be that of medieval catholicism, American evangelicalism, or liberation theology--adopts the world's standards of what is right and then sets out to defeat the world on its terms. The battle ends before it begins. Theological and ethical sentimentality reassure people that, whatever the gospel means, it does not mean obedience; not death. Love, divine or human, could never be so costly, we tell ourselves. After all, our culture is at least vestigially Christian, and isn't that enough?<sup>2</sup>

Willimon's observations are correct. If the church adopts the world's standards for goodness and rightness, it will ultimately simply reflect the world's value systems--an unappealing possibility for the Christian church. The marketing paradigm as applied to the church, however, does not adopt the world's standards for goodness and rightness, nor does it seek to compete with the world on the same competitive level as does business by artificially boosting the value of its product or by creating a less than fully

---

<sup>2</sup>William H. Willimon, The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics Are Related (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 95.

disclosing message which is designed simply to attract purchasers for profit. Inherent in the church's usage of the paradigm's valuing process itself is the need for limitations on what can and cannot be considered contributing to the establishment of value. For value to be established there must be boundaries which define where value ends and where non-value begins. An ideal product with exceptional intrinsic value is not perceived as valuable without some parameters within which such value can be measured and established. And when the reality of human perception is taken into account, the love of God is no exception to this rule. Willimon continues,

When acceptance is elevated as an ethical value, God becomes the great acceptor par excellence, a cosmic Rogerian counselor who excludes no one and no behavior from his oozing grace. How could such a God have ended up on a cross? How could such a God invite us to his kingdom since, without boundaries on divine acceptance, there can be no kingdom?<sup>9</sup>

If the church's message has value and quality, if the message is truthful, if the Product ultimately results in freedom to live life more abundantly, then the value of such a Product can be communicated forcefully and convincingly with integrity through the marketing paradigm. A product seldom sells its own value, for this reason the church has been entrusted as an institution with the responsibility to help maintain the perceived value of the Product it

---

<sup>9</sup>Willimon, The Service of God, 90.

represents. The marketing paradigm, as applied to the church renewal process, is designed to enable the church to carry out this responsibility.

The process along which the church accomplishes her goals and objectives is called the process of sanctification. The church is designed to support an individual in his or her journey toward Christian perfection as well as to support the journey of society towards a similar perfection in which both the individual and the social can support each other. H. Richard Niebuhr explains,

We do not confront an isolated Christ known to us apart from a company of witnesses who surround him, point to him, interpret this and that feature of his presence, explain to us the meaning of his words, direct our attention to his relation with the Father and the Spirit. Without direct confrontation there is no truth for me in all such testimony; but without companions, collaborators, teachers, corroborating witnesses, I am at the mercy of my imaginations.<sup>10</sup>

If the church fails to see enough value in gathering together as a body that it refuses to implement structures that are designed to help support that gathering and minimize the ease at which persons may carelessly reject that gathering, is the church then being faithful to its mission to bring people together for growth in Belief, for ministry to the hurting, and for service to the world?

The marketing paradigm helps the church focus its energies on defining and prioritizing the value it perceives

---

<sup>10</sup>Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 245.

its Product to be. The paradigm is a way to help the church regain ownership of its Product and take pride in the multitude of Product derivations. It is a way to enable the church to assume a leadership and visionary function in society. According to Noyce,

The ethics of religious leadership involves practicing theology not as a technical science but as a reflection on the Christian tradition in dialogue with present-day human life so that the church may better fulfill its task.<sup>11</sup>

It is only as the church has the strong conviction that what it offers really does matter and does have value that it will be energized to act. This position, however, is not without its qualifications. As Noyce continues,

The consequentialist in ethics may argue that any method is legitimate as long as a good end is served. The means, however, is virtually part of the end. The medium is part of the message. The "anything goes" approach is self-defeating, especially when the "product" is a matter of faith and integrity itself.<sup>12</sup>

Noyce's comments are valid. Yet, when the means used in achieving the goals of the church are directly derivative of the essence of Belief itself (faith, hope, love), the means take on the quality of the Product itself and are in themselves ethically and morally validated. If this is not the case, then the church itself is incapable of acting in an ethical manner as it seeks to promote the value of its

---

<sup>11</sup> Noyce, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Noyce, 177.



Product--a process which the church hopes will result in church growth, evangelism, etc. It is only as the church affirms that there is value in the church's Product that the church is better able to develop its message and convincingly communicate the urgency and importance of its function. Such a task is inherently ethical in its formation; it cannot be undertaken effectively without serious reflection and integrity.

The church has an awesome ethical responsibility as an institution to uphold the value of the Product, for it is through the appropriation of the Product that one is motivated to emulate the quality of life inherent in the Product itself. This quality of life can be understood as living under the power of Belief in God which is itself enriched by the church's efforts at enabling and strengthening personal response to the grace that enables such Belief. Yet, the church must not only communicate the power and value of the Product to those inside the church, but it must also embody its own Product and model what its Product looks like when expressed through an organizational structure to those outside the church. The church, as a business, is called to model the best of what business has to offer. The church as an institution, is called to model the best of what an institution can offer. The church as an embodiment of Belief in God is called to model what life lived in Belief looks like.

The church is called to be the embodiment of moral rightness and to foster the nurture of character as well as of faith development. Willimon expresses this responsibility as he quotes James Gustafson, "We are in the church because God has called us together, while we are together, the church becomes the primary locus of a Christian's moral formation."<sup>13</sup> While Willimon may have overstated the impact of the church on an individual's moral formation--due to the human propensity for sin which affects even the church--nevertheless, the church's Product has value for moral and ethical development. The marketing paradigm enables this value to be more clearly identified and sustained as well as appropriated with integrity. In this capacity, the paradigm can operate ethically as it applies to the pricing of the Product.

#### An Ethical Promotion

In Chapter 5 the marketing paradigm was applied to the promotional responsibility of the church. The model was used to identify ways the church could develop specific derivations of the Product, package those derivations (ministries), and communicate the value of such derivations to those inside and outside the church. Is this application of the marketing paradigm helpful, good, and useful to the church?

---

<sup>13</sup>Willimon, Service of God, 32.

The marketing paradigm helps the church view itself as a communications entity--as a Belief-broker which specializes in helping persons connect with the Product that will enable them to grow in faith and relationships. Such a process is inherently promotional and is foundationally ethical. Only through appropriating the various ways of continuing on to sanctification are persons nurtured in their spiritual journeys and transformed in their daily lives. Without a conscious promotional effort, the church is less likely to connect with the true needs of its congregations and may engage instead in what could be considered passive ministry. According to Dennis Benson,

It's a sad realization that most churches operate on a pathological communication mode. People receive attention only if they are upset about something, experience a tragedy, or have a personal problem. Those who are generally happy or do not communicate their concerns receive no attention.<sup>14</sup>

Is the church being faithful to its mission if it does not assertively provide the opportunities for engaging persons, in their moments of joy as well as in their moments of need? If the church has the message (Product) and is confident in the helpfulness of the message (value), but does not tell the message (promotion) with consistency and integrity (ethics), is it right and good? The church is engaged in the process of promotion--it must promote--and it

---

<sup>14</sup> Benson, 82-3.

must use the tools available to it to aid in that promotional process. In the words of H. Richard Niebuhr, "If [a Christian] is to confess Jesus before men, he must do so by means of words and ideas derived from culture . . . ." <sup>15</sup> If the church is to be faithful to its mission, it can only do so if it promotes, for promotion is the process of the church making itself available to others; promotion is the process of evangelism, one of the four main theological foundations of Protestant theology.

Despite the benefits of the marketing paradigm when applied to the promotional responsibility of the church, many perceive that the paradigm carries with it the greatest possibilities for ethical abuses at this point in the process. It is in the arena of promotion that many believe propensities arise to sacrifice integrity for immediate results, value for numbers, and the message for expediency. Is this a valid perception? While it is true that the message can be exaggerated, the value overstated, and the benefits overrated, such manipulative abuse of the paradigm is not as easy as it appears. The paradigm comes with its own built-in checks-and-balances which are grounded in the understanding of human freedom. It is not as easy as it may seem to persuade a person to accept a message, whether it is the absolute truth or a falsehood, as many advertisers in

---

<sup>15</sup> Niebuhr, Christ and Culture., 70.

the business world have found out. Advertising consultants Al Ries and Jack Trout explain,

[A] fallacy in the minds of most marketing managers is the belief that "truth will out." In other words, if you have the "facts" on your side, it's only necessary to find a good advertising agency who can communicate those facts to the prospect and a good sales force who can close the sale. We call this approach "inside out" thinking--that somehow the advertising agency or the sales force can take the truth, as the company knows it, and use this truth to clear up the misconceptions that reside inside the mind of the prospect.

Don't be fooled. Misconceptions cannot easily be changed by an advertising or sales effort. . . Truth is the perception that's inside the mind of the prospect. It may not be your truth, but it is the only truth you can work with. You have to accept that truth and then deal with it.<sup>14</sup>

The marketing paradigm is an instrument that helps identify and communicate perceptions of reality. For the church, this poses a theological problem: If perceptions are what people are attracted to, enticed by, and rely on to formulate understandings of reality and of God, what if the church's expression of reality are communicated wrongly or inadequately? If the marketing paradigm is a powerful way of influencing perceptions, what happens if those perceptions are influenced in the wrong manner? For example, if persons perceive God's grace as freely given and so readily available to all at the beckon of a simple openness of acceptance, then the church must not be surprised when they necessarily ask why the institutional church keeps

---

<sup>14</sup>Ries and Trout, Marketing Warfare, 28-9.

begging them to serve in mission, to give their money away and to attend worship services and classes. Is not the perception the mainline Protestant church encourages one that supports this idea that individuals are able to connect with God just as effectively without the church's help? Perhaps the problem the church faces is that it is perceived as sending a conflicting theological message to persons in a powerful manner. The marketing paradigm is not responsible for the message it conveys; rather, it is simply able to be used as a tool which can both support theological integrity as well as help destroy it, depending on how it is implemented.

The marketing paradigm itself is a means for enabling the sharing and nurturing of Belief. The paradigm enables the church to more effectively carry out its mission. The more this mission is communicated and promoted--the more persons hear, respond, appropriate, adapt, accept, adhere to and share the Product--the more widespread will be those who struggle to do the will of God and, as a result, the more faithful and successful the church becomes as it works to bring in the Kingdom of God. If the Kingdom is to be an historical event brought about with the cooperation of human effort, it must be promoted into being as well as missioned into being. Promotion spreads the possibility that Belief will be more widely appropriated which provides the foundation on which is built social transformation. The

marketing paradigm helps the church succeed in its mission in a competitive society and, for this reason, the paradigm can be considered able to operate in an ethical manner by Christian standards as applied to the promotional function.

#### Recovering the Success of Faithfulness

It is at this point that a definition of success as applied to the church needs to be addressed. Success is a term that has derived negative connotations in the church as it is perceived to be reflective of the standards of the business world. It is a term which must be rescued and re-integrated with the church's concept of faithfulness if the church is to remain faithful to its mission by implementing a conscious approach to the marketing paradigm.

In Chapter 2 the schism between the terms faithful and success was addressed without focusing on the ethical implications of the separation. The marketing paradigm provides the way to re-integrate the terms so that the mission of the church is able to be carried out both faithfully and successfully, as well as ethically. This process is developed as follows.

For the Christian church, faithfulness refers to doing that which is in accordance with the direction of the will of God as revealed in the life, teaching and person of Jesus the Christ; a will which is received and validated by the Holy Spirit. With this understanding, the criterion by which the church is measured in terms of its faithfulness is

whether or not it is carrying out the will of God. The Great Commission in Matthew has historically provided the church with an understanding of this will:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matt. 28:19).

This commission, combined with the mandate to love God and neighbor, has been how the church has theologically understood the will of God for its mission. If the church continues to perceive the Great Commission and the mandate to love God and neighbor to be the continuing will of God for the church in the present day, then that which enables this perception to be acted on is being faithful to God's will (as understood by the church). Use of the marketing paradigm, as we have seen, enables this perceived will to be clarified and communicated with integrity, power and conviction. Therefore, it is my conclusion that the marketing paradigm can be faithfully applied to the mission of the church as it goes about attempting to do the will of God.

For the Christian church, the term success has often referred to the quantitative measures of how well a church seems to be doing. These measures are reflected in church membership figures, the number of persons converted and baptized into the church, the number of persons ministered to, visited, preached to, sat with, counseled, the amount of



money given to apportionments, mission, etc. This has been the traditional way of how the church has understood the term success--a term that is misunderstood and maligned except when viewed through the marketing paradigm.

The marketing paradigm enables one to understand the term success as possessing a qualitative as well as a quantitative dimension, although the qualitative dimension has received less attention in a world dominated by quantitative measures. It is not only the amount of the measure that is to be considered when judging the success of the church, but also the quality of the measure. In church terms, the qualitative measure of success would refer to the way in which a person's conversion manifests itself in mission and in exhibition of a Christian lifestyle as defined by the degree to which a person becomes more loving and more caring--in short, more expressive of the will of God. The church is then able to measure success on the larger scale by the degree to which the church itself is better able to connect with and minister to the deepest needs of those individuals for whom it is responsible. Such a qualitative dimension to the term success is best described by sales consultant Zig Ziglar as he writes,

Success is not measured by how you perform compared with how others perform. . . . Success--real success is measured by how you do compared

with what you could be doing with the ability God gave you.<sup>17</sup>

The church is judged by how well it does as compared with how well it could be doing with the resources and talents God has blessed it with. The qualitative dimension is the key to understanding why the church needs to recover for itself the power behind the term success.

By merging the two dimensions of success, by combining the quantitative with the qualitative, the definition of the term merges into a definition equivalent to the meaning of the term faithful. Is a church that grows in ministering to and teaching of persons, a church that preaches and visits, a church that is alive and active, a church which connects with the realities of people's lives as it helps bring them into a stronger relationship with God, and a church that grows in numbers because it does these things, being faithful? As was previously stated, "the more successful a church is at fulfilling people's needs, the greater are its chances for growth. Thus quantity is a consequence of quality."<sup>18</sup> Faithfulness and success are close relatives to each other.

A concern may be raised at this point that many attempts to be faithful to the church's mission may not always result in measurable success as it has been defined.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ziglar, 97.

<sup>18</sup> Barna, 17.

To address this concern two areas need to be probed carefully. First, the question must be asked: Was the effort truly faithful to the mission of the church? Did it truly attempt to do the will of God? Second, and most important, the question must be ask: Was the effort considered unsuccessful in terms of its qualitative measures or only its quantitative measures? The qualitative aspects of growth are usually the most difficult ones to perceive because they cannot be objectively quantified by their very nature. Such qualitative dimensions can only be identified by subjective human perception; yet, there is a range within which such qualitative dimensions of growth can be more correctly identified. This range can be thought of as including the following subjective measures: if there is a noticeable positive change in outlook, questions, spiritual maturity, relationships and missional activities of those who make up the congregation. The primary measure of success and faithfulness in the church is if there a noticeable difference in the aura of the church over time. Is the church becoming more hospitable, warm, loving, caring, concerned, or is it more tense, angry, hateful, competitive? The qualitative dimension is just as measurable as the quantitative, but uses a more subjective set of criteria.

If the qualitative dimension is successfully accomplished by the church, it must ultimately translate

into the quantitative over time; however, the process is not necessarily reciprocal. The quantitative measure may not always translate into the qualitative. A growing church is not always one that is steeped in quality, but a quality-oriented church is usually one steeped in growing quantity as needs are met and lives transformed. It is in the accomplishing of the qualitative goals that the quantitative goals follow. Nevertheless, the church's primary responsibility in faithfulness to its mission is to achieve its qualitative goals regardless of their impact on the quantitative goals. In the words of Gaylord Noyce,

Ostensibly . . . the goal of the congregation is not self-aggrandizement but service to the world. Institutional success is important only to the degree that it serves the need of the world to grow in loving God and loving neighbor.<sup>19</sup>

If success can be understood as quality which results in quantity, such a term remains faithful to the understanding of the value of the Product and is a helpful measure in providing the feedback mechanisms through which the church can continue to faithfully and successfully meet the obligations of its mission. The use of the marketing paradigm to help the church connect with the needs of modern society in terms of both success and faithfulness is ethically defensible. Understanding the church in marketing terms is an ethical undertaking--it is a means of helping

---

<sup>19</sup>Noyce, 176.

the church understand and connect with the needs of persons steeped in a culture and social environment that demands unique and powerful ways of engagement. The marketing paradigm is also a means by which the church itself is held accountable to its task, for the church too is under the same criterion to be faithful and successful in its mission as is any business.

The church prides itself on holding accountable businesses, multi-national corporations, the government, other religions, other churches and their spokespersons, members of school boards and civic groups on ethical, social and moral issues, but will the church hold its own membership accountable to their vows to uphold the church with prayers, presence, gifts and service? When the church fails to hold its own people accountable to and for the church in all four of these categories, what statement does this make to a world already confused about the church's role and function for the twenty-first century?

A degree of skepticism as to whether the church really believes what it is doing is evident in the mass exodus of membership from the United Methodist denomination and the lack of respect the church receives. As most churches have experienced, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to solicit volunteers to keep the institutional church functioning; it is harder to raise money to support missions; it is getting more difficult to get congregations

excited about service. The church of today has no choice but to step out in trust in its own Product and risk what it is so that it may become what it is meant to become. The church must have strong visionary leadership which is not afraid to restore value to the church's purpose and mission. The church needs direction. As Lyle Schaller writes,

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of passive organizations is the large number of members who wish somebody would do something! They are surrendering control to the tiny number (often zero) of members who are willing to accept and fulfill the role of initiating leaders or, more often, are waiting for external forces to determine their future.<sup>20</sup>

A point of comparison. In the Los Angeles Times alone, the Roman Catholic church gets approximately eighty-percent of the coverage of religious news except for the scandals that periodically receive more attention. The United Methodist Church receives very little exposure to Los Angeles (or to the world overall) through the news medium. The church does not advertise its presence adequately on a regular basis; it does not adequately promote the benefits one can expect to receive if one engages in the activities of the church; it does not, as a body, have a formal conviction of accountability which provides the necessary boundaries that can hold its members accountable to and for the operation of the institutional church. Does the church under the present system have a vision? Is the church,

---

<sup>20</sup>Schaller, 44 Ways, 120-21.

under the current circumstances, acting ethically? By applying the same criteria we have applied to the marketing paradigm, let us explore these questions more fully.

Modern society seems to have asked the church if the church knows its mission to the modern age. Such a condition has stimulated a review of the theological task of the church and has proliferated church-renewal literature. The church has apparently not been overly effective in communicating its message. The battle for the primacy of the United Methodist Church is being lost to the tune of 70,000 members each year. A radical reorientation of thinking must happen to end this trend. The church must discover new ways to keep those persons it does have and to attract those persons it does not have. Just as the bishops in their letter "In Defense of Creation" did not credit God with the responsibility for stepping in to stop a nuclear holocaust, neither will God step in to rescue a church from a steady decline without serious work, struggle and conviction on the part of the church. Is it ethical to let the United Methodist Church decline by refusing to adapt to its new environment, by refusing to adapt the best of what is available to the church to achieve the gospel's purpose? If the church is to succeed at its task, it must be both faithful and successful, as both are inextricably woven together if the church's mission is to be ethically defensible in the modern age.

A question may now be raised: Was Jesus successful? This question must be answered in the affirmative. Tradition has credited Jesus with the understanding that his actions emulated his message, his integrity was woven into his very being. Jesus set out to heal, to teach, to stimulate faith and to model the Kingdom of God. Was he successful? Did he accomplish his purpose? By applying both quantitative and qualitative measures we can see that Jesus taught, healed, modeled the Kingdom and stimulated the faith of many of those he came in contact with. By both measures, Jesus can be considered successful in what he set out to do. Even though he died a premature death, Jesus accomplished what he understood his task to be; how else could the words "It is finished" (John 19:30) be understood? According to Barna,

Don't underestimate the marketing lessons Jesus taught. He understood his product thoroughly, developed an unparalleled distribution system, advanced a method of promotion that has penetrated every continent, and offered His product at a price that is within the grasp of every consumer (without making the product so accessible that it lost its value).<sup>21</sup>

Many believed because of Jesus' efforts. The enthusiasm of such belief spread rapidly throughout the Hellenistic world. Paul was caught up in that same zest. There was a power to the message, a conviction that the gospel was the message people needed to hear. It was not

---

<sup>21</sup> Barna, 50.



the right theology, but the right relationship that was the core of the message. The relationship with God established by Belief in God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ was the energizing force in the early church. It took energized leaders to spread (sell) the message to the world. As Peters and Austin write,

Superior leadership, make no bones about it, is pure selling, selling in the best sense of the word--i.e., establishing the perception, the feeling, the picture, that your view is right, that you listen, hear and understand, that you are worth listening to and following (or buying from).<sup>22</sup>

The question we are faced with today is: Is the relationship established by Belief in God's grace as affirmed in Christ the energizing force for the church? Is Belief the church's primary Product, or has social action, political agendas, economic concerns, ego, power and disorganization and rebellion clouded that message? Is it ethical that the church should be relegated to least among the priorities of persons lives? Or should the church insist on its right to exist in a society that, in spite of its own ignorance, needs the church to carry out its mission? If the church will not discover a way to penetrate the consumption/capitalist orientation of society, the church will continue to be led by society instead of being the transforming leader of society. The institutional church

---

<sup>22</sup>Peters and Austin, 93.

must take ownership of its message and translate that ownership into action. The marketing paradigm offers a way; the church must decide if it is willing to respond. The Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg clarifies the challenge,

Everyone is capable of knowing that intending and not doing when doing is possible, is not really intending, that loving and not doing what is good when doing is possible is not really loving. This is merely thinking that one intends and loves; that is, it is thought all by itself, which fades away and dissipates.<sup>23</sup>

#### An Ethical Conclusion

The church's Product is worthy of the best effort the church can give at developing programs and ministries, at communicating the value placed on such derivations of the Product, and in promoting the benefits of acquiring the Product among its own membership. The church can be considered to operate ethically only if (in this present age of competition) it rises to seriously address the challenge of the competition. By not engaging the competition for the mind, hearts, time and resources of persons (when such an opportunity presents itself to the church), the church is not acting in the right; it is not attempting to connect on the terms of where people are at, but only on where the church is at which, too often, is outside the reality construct of the people. Karl Barth summarized it when he wrote,

---

<sup>23</sup>Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, trans. George F. Dole (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984), 378.

[P]eople, educated and uneducated alike, are simply *disappointed* in us, unspeakably disappointed. Have they been too often--perhaps for centuries--*put off*? Has the church, in spite of its very best of intentions to meet their needs, too often indulged in secondary utterances?<sup>24</sup>

In modern society, without competing, how can the church's Product get expressed? How can the gospel be communicated effectively if it is not done in a conscious, quality fashion supported by the best tools the church has to work with to connect its message with society? If it does not attempt to use marketing theory and tools in a responsible manner, the church is relegated to the level of attempting to transform a competitive sphere in a manner which really does not stand much of a chance for success. For the church to effectively fulfill its mission in a competitive society, it must adopt a marketing understanding of the reality in which it finds itself, anything less will not be able to engage the competition effectively. The present condition afflicting the church confirms this observation, experience supports it. It is time for the church to gear up and market--it is theologically supported, ethically mandated, and the natural outgrowth of a quest for perfection--which is ultimately a Christian's final calling--being made perfect by the love of God through Christ.

In the words of the Apostle Paul,

---

<sup>24</sup> Barth, Word of God, 111.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:8-9)

By appropriating Belief, by emulating Belief, by valuing Belief, by communicating Belief, the church rises to meet the challenge of a society in desperate need of the church's Product. This is an ethical undertaking, a Christian response, a valid paradigm for church renewal.

## CHAPTER 7

### Summary

#### Review

The thesis of this project is that through the effective implementation of marketing theory, integrated with theological and ethical principles and adapted to the unique mission and ministry of the local congregation, the United Methodist Church can regain priority in the lives of its members and rekindle their enthusiasm in support of the church's mission. In the previous six chapters, the reasoning as to why the marketing paradigm is necessary and how the church can go about implementing such a paradigm to enable it to more effectively serve in the present age was explored.

Chapter 1 focused on the critical need for a marketing-oriented understanding of the church and discussed the loss of membership and attendance presently facing the church. The marketing paradigm was presented as a way which can enable the church to rise to the challenges of the competitive environment in which it presently finds itself.

Chapter 2 discussed in greater detail the necessity for the marketing paradigm in view of the dominating world view communicated to all persons in society by the ideology of

capitalism--the primary mechanism for understanding daily existence in the present age in America. The power of this ideology was explored along with the competition it provides to the universal church by communicating a message of security which is to be found in material acquisition and preservation instead of in the church's traditional message of the grace of God.

A marketing understanding of the church in terms of faithfulness and success was also presented. The necessity of the church's conscious programming for success was discussed in order to enable the church to maintain its faithfulness in its mission.

Chapter 3 focused on the application of a marketing-oriented understanding of what the church has to offer persons in terms of product. It was presented that the church's Product is essentially the manifestation in tangible expression of belief in the tangible and intangible activities of the Living God. In short, the church's Product was identified as the embodiment of Belief in God--a tangible expression of Belief which helps nurture in the church's congregation the development of a stronger faith.

Chapter 4 focused on the need to understand the church's Product as something with value. In the society in which the church finds itself, competition is the atmosphere that dominates the individual's decision-making ability. An individual must either accept or reject those products that

he or she will appropriate, trust or believe in. The church's Product is no different than any other product the individual is forced to make a decision about--for the church's Product is also competing in the marketplace for people's time and interest. Merely criticizing the implications of such a world view does not respect the human freedom of choice to operate in such an environment--a freedom which is ultimately grounded in what the church understands as God's grace.

It was revealed that the church's message must be presented in such a fashion so as to stimulate the perception of value in the hearts and minds of the target customer. In this sense, the need was identified for the church to view its mission as a way to help maintain the value it perceives its Product (Belief) to be worth, and to position such value as a competitive alternative amidst the variety of other options persons are constantly asked to choose between.

It was also discussed that there are two ways of establishing the perception of value in the minds of potential customers--through the methods of coercion and persuasion, neither of which by themselves were capable of meeting the goals and objectives of the church to communicate the value of its Product. A new paradigm which merged the two approaches was then presented--a model by which members of the church voluntarily pledged to hold each

other accountable for membership requirements. This would be a primary condition for membership in the institutional expression of the church. Such a mutual-accountability has been historically understood by the church as a form of covenant discipleship--the action of helping each other take belief in God through Jesus Christ seriously. It was presented that while the grace of God is freely given, it is not freely received--a human response is necessary. The marketing paradigm was proposed as a way of understanding the necessary response on the part of the body of Christ to its own message.

In Chapter 5 the concept of promotion was discussed in terms of the specific ways the church could enable the appropriation of Belief to take place in the lives of its members. It was presented that all of the ministries of the church must be essentially derivations of Belief and must point beyond themselves toward a relationship with the living God.

It was also discussed that to be competitive, the church must utilize the various advertising and persuasive vehicles at its disposal to help it communicate its unique message in the midst of a culture that reduces everything to degrees of value. Such an approach was presented as mandating that the church utilize sales and marketing theory, as well as persuasive communication methods, to



enable its message a fair hearing in its competitive environment.

In Chapter 6 the theological foundations and ethical implications of understanding the church and its purpose through a marketing paradigm was presented. It was noted that the marketing paradigm can support the four traditional Protestant theological foundations and can help translate them in contemporary language. It was also presented that the church responds ethically to the modern condition if it programs itself for success as well as for faithfulness. It was argued that intentional mediocrity reduces the faithfulness of the church by decreasing both the quality of what the church has to offer as well as by reducing the experience of such quality by those to whom the church is designed to minister.

The concepts of faithfulness and success as complementary understandings, based on the foundation of intent, was probed. It was argued that to be ethical, the church must use the means at its disposal, in faithfulness, as it programs for the successful sharing of its message embodied in the variety of product manifestations it designs and implements.

#### Suggestions for Further Development

The process of understanding the purpose and ministry of the institutional church in marketing terms is a way of enabling the church to meet the demands of the competitive

environment in which it finds itself. The church must rise to meet the unique demands of a society immersed in a competitive market focus if the church is to remain faithful to its mission. Whether this process is a head-on confrontation taken in the position of "my product is better than yours," or whether the competitive attempts to obtain a fair hearing for its Product are less blatant and more subversive to the dominant American ideology, the church must acknowledge that it exists in the midst of an environment that demands a competitive mindset.

In order to maximize the use of the marketing paradigm for the church's purposes, specific examples of ministries, worship experiences, sermons, etc., consciously geared to enabling persons to grow in faith and to share that developing faith may prove helpful. Such examples can be clearly seen in a large number of the more successful churches (by the marketing standards of quantity and quality) found in many communities throughout the nation. While numerous studies have been done to identify what policies these successful churches have operated by, few have been able to articulate such policies in the language that will enable others to understand the marketing essence of what they are doing. Such an understanding will allow the church to begin researching the vast number of resources not found in the church's present library: resources of innovation techniques, sales skills, and marketing knowledge

which can be appropriated to a larger degree from the business world itself. If the church is to compete, it must understand in greater depth what it finds itself up against and what a capitalistic society is using against the church in an ideological battle to frustrate the church's attempt at articulating its Product as something greater than society itself.

An area to be developed in greater detail as a future project would be to walk the church through the marketing paradigm, from start to finish, as it applies to one of the church's specific Product derivations. An entire process which explores the specifics of identifying target groups, resourcing the needs and wants of such groups, developing programming to meet those needs in conjunction with meeting the church's need to communicate its Belief to its prospects, and following up on the success of such endeavors would provide the church with a tangible derivation of the concepts set forth in this project.

#### Conclusion

This project undertook to develop an ethical and theological framework for enabling the church to understand itself more clearly as an institution which passionately deserves the right to exist in the midst of a society dominated by a particular economic ideology. This project has defended and supported the concept that only by understanding the church in marketing terms in the present

context in which it finds itself, will the church be able to program effectively for its mission today and be enabled to rekindle the enthusiasm it desires among its membership. Such an action itself is contextual and, while this project is not the definitive answer to all the church's problems, it offers an element of hope in what the church otherwise risks perceiving as a bleak future for itself.

In order for this project to have made the desired impact on the thoughts and responses of its readers, it must not only have been able to persuasively communicate its message (success), but it must also have embodied the essence of its message as well (faithfulness). This project is both an expression of the church's articulation of Belief in God as understood in marketing terms, as well as an embodiment itself of such an articulation. Such an embodiment provides this project with its emotional as well as intellectual impact. This observation must be articulated in order to enable the reader to recognize that this project has an agenda beyond the mere sharing of and defense of its message. This agenda is to provide the manifestation of this project's thesis in the heart and mind of the reader--in essence "to rekindle the enthusiasm in the United Methodist church"--a process which must begin with the reader.

It must also be acknowledged that the anticipated reader's needs and desires have been actively taken into

consideration in the presentation of this material so as to provide the reader with a sense of the power of the marketing paradigm as it can apply to the fulfilling of the mission of the church. The reader has been involved in the reception of what could be considered a selling process itself--a process which the reader alone can judge the effectiveness of--a process the church itself can undertake in faithfulness in much the same way it has been presented in this project.

## Bibliography

Books

- Allen, Ronald J. Preaching For Growth. St. Louis: CBP Press, 1988.
- Barna, George. Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988.
- Barth, Karl. The Word of God and the Word of Man. Trans. Douglas Horton. New York: Harper/Torchbooks, 1957.
- Bartlett, David L., and Ruth Fowler. Moments of Commitment: Years of Growth. St. Louis: CBP Press, 1987.
- Beker, J. Christiaan. Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought. 1980. Reprint. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- Bellah, Robert N., et al. Habits Of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. 1985. Reprint. New York: Harper & Row/Perennial Library, 1986.
- Benson, Dennis C. The Visible Church. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.
- Berger, Peter L. A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural. New York: Doubleday, 1969.
- , The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. 1967. Reprint. Garden City: Doubleday/Anchor, 1969.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. The Cost Of Discipleship. Revised ed. Trans. R.H. Fuller. 1949. Reprint. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Bow, Russell. The Integrity of Church Membership. Waco: Word Books, 1968.
- Buber, Martin. I and Thou. 2nd ed. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- Buttrick, David. Homiletic: Moves and Structures. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

- Callahan, Kennon L. Twelve Keys to an Effective Church. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.
- Carlson, Martin E. Why People Give. New York: Council Press, National Council of Churches, 1968.
- Clinard, Turner N. Responding to God: The Life of Stewardship. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980.
- Foster, Richard. Innovation: The Attacker's Advantage. New York: McKinsey, 1986.
- Frankl, Viktor E. Man's Search For Meaning. 3rd ed. New York: Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, 1984.
- Gonzalez, Justo L., and Catherine G. Gonzalez. Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- Graybeal, David M. The Christian Family and Its Money. Cincinnati: Women's Division of Christian Service, Board of Missions, Methodist Church, 1963.
- Hawkins, Del I., et al. Consumer Behavior: Implications for Marketing Strategy. Dallas: Business Publications, 1980.
- Heilbroner, Robert L. The Nature and Logic of Capitalism. 1985. Reprint. New York: Norton; Ontario: Penguin, 1986.
- Hendricks, J. Sherrell, et. al., eds. Christian Word Book. Nashville: Graded Press, 1968.
- Hinson, William H. A Place to Dig In: Doing Evangelism in the Local Church. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.
- Holsinger, James W. Jr., and Evelyn Laycock. Awaken the Giant. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.
- Hopkins, Tom. How to Master the Art of Selling. 2nd ed. Ed. Warren Jamison. 1980. Reprint. New York: Warner Books, 1982.
- Jackson, Gordon E. with Phyllisee Foust Jackson. Pathways to Faith: The Stories of 210 Faithful People. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.
- Johnson, Douglas W. Vitality Means Church Growth. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.

- Kantonen, T.A. A Theology for Christian Stewardship. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1956.
- LaBier, Douglas. Modern Madness: The Emotional Fallout of Success. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1986.
- Linn, Jan G. Christians Must Choose: The Lure of Culture and the Command of Christ. St. Louis: CBP Press, 1985.
- McGavran, Donald A. Understanding Church Growth. Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Mitchell, Arnold. The Nine American Lifestyles: Who We Are and Where We're Going. 1983. Reprint. New York: Warner Books, 1984.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. Christ and Culture. New York: Harper/Torchlight, 1956.
- . Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays. New York: Harper & Row/Torchbooks, 1970.
- . The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- . The Social Sources of Denominationalism. New York: Meridian/Living Age, 1957.
- Noyce, Gaylord. Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.
- Outler, Albert C. Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit. Nashville: Tidings, 1971.
- Peacock, Peter R. "Applying Marketing Principles to Outreach Programs." Managing Today's Church. Ed. Robert N. White. Valley Forge: Judson, 1981.
- Peters, Thomas J., and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. In Search of Excellence: Lessons From America's Best-Run Companies. 1982. Reprint. New York: Warner Books, 1984.
- Peters, Tom, and Nancy Austin. A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference. New York: Random House, 1985.
- Quick, William K. Signs Of Our Times: A Vision for the Church. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.



- Ries, Al, and Jack Trout. Marketing Warfare. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986.
- . Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind. 1981. Reprint. New York: Warner Books, 1982.
- Schaller, Lyle E. Activating the Passive Church: Diagnosis and Treatment. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.
- . Assimilating New Members. Nashville: Abingdon, 1978.
- . 44 Ways To Increase Church Attendance. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.
- . It's A Different World: The Challenge For Today's Pastor. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.
- Seifert, Harvey. New Power for the Church. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.
- Swedenborg, Emanuel. Heaven and Hell. Trans. George F. Dole. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984.
- United Methodist Church. The Book of Discipline, 1988. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.
- Thompson, T.K., ed. Stewardship in Contemporary Theology. New York: Association Press, 1960.
- Van Seters, Arthur, ed. Preaching As a Social Act: Theology and Practice. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.
- Vine, W. E. et al., eds. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. Nashville: Nelson, 1985.
- Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary [1st ed.].
- Westerhoff, John H. III. Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal. New York: Seabury, 1979.
- White, Robert N., ed. Managing Today's Church. Valley Forge: Judson, 1981.
- Wilke, Richard B. And Are We Yet Alive?: The Future of the United Methodist Church. Nashville: Abingdon, 1986.
- . Signs and Wonders: The Mighty Work of God in the Church. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.

Willimon, William H. The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics Are Related. Nashville: Abingdon, 1983.

Willimon, William H., and Robert L. Wilson. Rekindling the Flame: Strategies for a Vital United Methodism. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.

Ziglar, Zig. Top Performance. Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1986.

#### Periodicals

Chandler, Russell. "Customer Poll Shapes a Church." Los Angeles Times, 11 Dec. 1989: A1, A28-30.

Kavanaugh, John. "Ideas of the Marketplace." Media and Values (Los Angeles) [Media Action Research], no. 37 (Fall 1986): 3-5.

Ostling, Richard N. "Those Mainline Blues." Time. 22 May 1989: 94-6.

United Methodist Newscope: The National Weekly Newsletter for United Methodist Leaders. 30 June 1989: 1.